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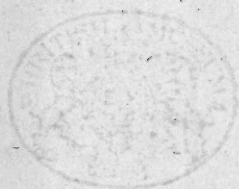
Philosophical, Historical, and Moral

E S S A Y

O N

O L D M A I D S.

V O L. III.



A
Philosophical, Historical, and Moral
E S S A Y
O N
O L D M A I D S.
B Y
A FRIEND TO THE SISTERHOOD.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. III.

*To unfold the sage
And serious Doctrine of Virginity.* MILTON'S Comus.

Περὶ τῶνδε κορών ἐν τοῖς θαλαμοῖς ὑπρασπιστῶν ἀνίσταται.
ARISTOPHANES.

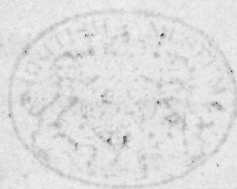
Nemo apud nos, qui idem tentaverit; nemo apud Græcos, qui unus omnia ea tractaverit.—Res ardua, vetustis novitatem dare, novis auctoritatem, obsoletis nitorem, obscuris lucem, fastiditis gratiam, dubiis fidem, omnibus vero naturam, et naturæ suæ omnia. Itaque, etiam non affectis, voluisse, abundè pulchrum, atque magnificum est.

PLINII Hist. Nat. Præfatio.

THE SECOND EDITION.

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M.DCC.LXXXVI.



AN
E S S A Y
ON
OLD MAIDS.

PART V.

ON CHRISTIAN AND OTHER MODERN
OLD MAIDS.

CHAP. I.

*On Saint Gregory of Nyssa, and his Panegyric
on Virginity.*

I RETURN from the chaste and
pious poets to the prosaic encomiasts
of virginity. On examining the ecclesi-
astical writers who have merited this title,
I find they are such a host, that I fear
the attention of my reader would desert
me, if I attempted to enumerate and de-

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B

scribe

scribe them. I shall now, therefore, confine myself to four succeeding fathers of the church, who are entitled to our regard by the highest reputation for sanctity and eloquence; and from these I shall only select, as briefly as I can, such passages as seem to throw a particular light on the sisterhood, and are at the same time remarkable for strength and originality either of thought or expression.

The first of the four is St. Gregory of Nyssa, a younger brother of the great St. Basil, and a friend and correspondent of the poetical St. Gregory, who formed the principal subject of our last chapter. The St. Gregory of whom I am now to speak, was ordained bishop of Nyssa, in Cappadocia, by his brother St. Basil, in 372; in 385 he preached the funeral sermon of the empress Placilla; and by a late writer he is said to have died in 396, with the venerable title of Father of the Fathers.

The panegyric which this faint composed on virginity is the more remarkable, as we
have

have positive evidence that he was himself a married man. This circumstance, however, is very far from having rendered him a languid advocate for the excellence of a single life; on the contrary, he begins his encomium by declaring, “that whoever ambitiously hopes to bestow such praise on virginity as is adequate to its merit, resembles a person who foolishly supposes that he may encrease the magnitude of the ocean by a drop of his own sweat*.”

The sisterhood will, I hope, excuse in their holy advocate the indelicacy of this expression, for the flattering energy of the sentiment.—But to proceed with St. Gregory.

Having asserted the dignity of this celestial excellence, he laments his own groveling condition, in being precluded by marriage from a share of this glory. “A know-

* Εοικε την σταγονα των οικειων ιδρωτων αξιολογον εις προσθηκην νομιζειν τω απειρω πελαγει γενησεσθαι.

Sanct. Greg. Nyss. de Virginitate.

Op. tom. ii. p. 546. edit. Par. 1615.

“ledge of the charms that belong to celibacy, is to me,” says St. Gregory, “what food is to the ox, when, turned to a full rack, he is prevented from reaching it by his harness.”—Having forcibly described his own mortifications by this striking image, he enlarges on the various evils that arise from matrimony, which he considers as a great source, not only of unhappiness, but of guilt.—“Look,” says he, “at the passing scene—marriage is the general prologue to all the tragedies of life.”—After painting the conjugal state in the most gloomy colours, he delineates, with a brilliant pencil, the pure delights of virginity, which he represents as a certain art and power of eluding all the vexations of earth, and attaining, even on this side the grave, the beatitude of heaven.

Having declaimed against wedlock with much freedom, or rather contempt and scorn, the saint seems to apprehend that his zeal for chastity has carried him too far, and he

he makes the following remarkable apology.

“ Let no one,” says he, “ imagine that I
 “ intend to censure the establishment of
 “ marriage; for I am aware that it has not
 “ wanted the approbation of God: but, since
 “ nature sufficiently instigates mankind to
 “ people the world by this connection, it
 “ would be superfluous labour to compose
 “ an encomium on marriage, which finds,
 “ in the alluring voice of pleasure, an eter-
 “ nal advocate and patron; while virginity
 “ is in some measure the antagonist of na-
 “ ture*. My sentiments on matrimony,”
 continues the saint, “ are these:—we ought
 “ to prefer to it the care of our celestial in-
 “ terest, and yet not to despise the person
 “ who makes a wise and temperate use of
 “ this institution.”

Though the saint, in the preceding sen-
 tence, has consulted his own personal credit

* Αἰσθάνεται δὲ πῶς ἡ παρθενία τῇ φύσει.

S. Greg. Nyss. p. 568.

as a married man, he very candidly proceeds to declare, that “ although marriage may
 “ be regarded as a kind of safe port against
 “ the tempests of licentious passion, yet vir-
 “ ginity affords a securer refuge, and a
 “ more tranquil harbour.”

He contends, that man, as originally created, was perfectly free from all animal desires; and, instead of receiving pleasure from the gratification of sensual appetite, delighted only in the contemplation of his Maker. He alledges, it is evident from scripture*, that Adam had no connubial intercourse with Eve till after their expulsion from Paradise, when woman was condemned to the pains of child-birth, as a punishment for disobedience. “ Therefore,” continues the saint, “ as we lost Paradise by
 “ the sensual offence of our first parents, it
 “ is in our own power to regain it by a vo-
 “ luntary sacrifice of all sensual pleasures.
 “ As the persons who have wandered from

* See Genesis chap. iv.

“ their

“ their own country, and wish to return to
 “ it, begin by quitting the place to which
 “ they have strayed; in the same manner,
 “ since marriage was the last step which
 “ completed our separation from Paradise, I
 “ would advise those who are ambitious of
 “ returning thither, to begin by relinquish-
 “ ing marriage, the *last stage* *, *as it were*,
 “ in the road between earth and heaven.

St. Gregory proceeds to prove the do-
 minion of virginity over death, which he
 accomplishes by a singular mode of reason-
 ing :—“ The production of children,” says
 he, “ does not minister so much to life as to
 “ death, since their birth only leads to their
 “ dissolution; but they who devote their
 “ persons to virginity, place themselves as a
 “ kind of isthmus between life and death, to
 “ stop the fury of the latter. The devasta-
 “ tion of death is thus prevented; for, as
 “ the power of fire cannot subsist without
 “ fuel, so the force of death cannot prevail,
 “ unless marriage supplies him with his
 “ prey.”

* Ωςπερ τινα σταθμον ισχυατον.

The saint now enters on a more minute description of virginity; which does not, he says, consist merely in personal purity, but in discharging all the duties of a tranquil and spotless mind. He borrows, on this occasion, from his brother St. Basil the remarkable simile, which I have already mentioned, of the successive circles produced in water by the impulse of a single stone; an image which he uses to illustrate the agitation produced in a peaceful mind by the admission of any one inordinate desire.—“ Let virginity,” says the saint, “ be the foundation on which the works of virtue are raised; for, excellent and honourable as it is, if this purity of person is not united to integrity of mind—if the whole life of a virgin does not correspond to this professed excellence—if she is blackened by incontinence of spirit—her virginity is but an earring in the nose of a sow, or a pearl trodden under the feet of swine *.”

* ΤΕΤΟ ΕΣΤΙ ΤΟ ΕΥΩΤΙΟΝ ΕΧΕΙΝΟ ΤΟ ΕΝ ΤΗ ΡΙΝΙ ΤΗΣ ΣΥΟΥ, ἢ ΜΑΓΝΑΡΙΤΗΣ Ο ΕΝ ΤΟΙΣ ΠΟΣΙ ΤΩΝ ΧΟΙΡΩΝ ΚΑΤΑΠΑΤΕΥΜΕΝΟΣ.

Sanct. Greg. Nyss. p. 593.

I must

I must not omit the whimsical conceit with which St. Gregory asserts the honour of Miriam, the sister of Aaron, as the primitive model of true virginity. Having described her dancing with a timbrel in her hand, after the miraculous passage through the Red Sea, he imagines that this musical instrument is mentioned in scripture as a symbol of her chastity, on account of the similarity, which he discovers between virginity and the timbrel—a wonderful similarity! which Gregory has explained in language that I forbear to copy, lest the chaste eyes of the modern sisterhood should be shocked by the expressive images of this fanciful saint.

In a former part of my work I had occasion to remark, that Miriam was not entitled to this distinction, as she, in all probability, was a married woman. The genius and talents of this fair Hebrew seem, indeed, to have operated like those of a modern fine lady, who, eclipsing her husband by the brilliancy
of

of her spirit, reduces him to such insignificance, that he is rarely mentioned.

But to conclude this brief account of St. Gregory. In the subsequent part of his discourse, he endeavours to settle the just medium between luxury and extreme abstinence, as he is far from being a friend to that rigorous discipline by which the health of many a monastic recluse has been destroyed. The twenty-fourth and last chapter of his treatise is very remarkable; for, instead of declaiming, like most of the fathers, against the depravity of the times, he speaks of his own age as abounding in good examples.—“Sanctity,” says he, “is now, if ever, in so flourishing a state, that it wants but little to reach the summit of perfection.”—He concludes, by recommending it to those who wish to lead a virgin life, to put themselves under the guidance of an experienced and venerable conductor.

C H A P. II.

*On St. Ambrose, and his several Compositions
in Praise of Virginity.*

THE Latin fathers of the church were by no means inferior to the Greek, in the zealous veneration which they paid to virginity. The chaste devotees of Italy found an ardent, indefatigable advocate and patron in the celerated St. Ambrose, who was unexpectedly raised, by the voice of the people, from a civil station to the rank of an archbishop; and, having filled the episcopal throne of Milan about twenty years, ended his active and glorious life in that city at the age of 57, in the year 394.

This eminent writer devoted several distinct performances to the consecrated virgins. There are three of his productions that particularly claim our attention, and of these I shall speak as they occur.—The first,
and

and most elaborate, is a Treatise on Virgins, divided into three books, and addressed to his sister Marcellina ; who, hearing that he had preached with singular eloquence on this interesting topic, and being unable to attend his public discourses, requested from her brother the particulars of his doctrine.

Saint Ambrose begins his treatise with singular humility, in comparing himself to the speaking ass of Balaam. He then takes occasion, from the festival of St. Agnes, to celebrate the excellence of that virgin martyr, a Roman damsel, distinguished by her rank and beauty, who, with miraculous fortitude, at the age of thirteen, preferred the tortures of persecution to the rich offers of a Pagan lover, and perished by the sword in the beginning of the fourth century. It may be worth remarking, that the merits of this infant martyr have given rise to many the most abundant of pious panegyrics ; and that her name has been extolled by a succession of historians, saints, and poets, from the

the

the vehement Ambrose to the tender and elegant Maffillon, bishop of Clermont, whose works contain a most beautiful and pathetic sermon on the festival of this lovely martyr.

From the praise of Agnes, St. Ambrose proceeds to a general encomium on chastity, which was unknown, he says, or imperfectly preserved, through all the nations of the heathen world.—“ But how,” says the saint, very candidly, “ can the human understanding comprehend what nature has “ not included in her laws †?”—He then endeavours to prove, that celibacy is an institution of God, and heaven the true country of virgins. He expressly asserts that the preservation of chastity makes an angel, and the loss of it a devil ‡. He compares the condition of the wife, condemned

† Quis autem humano eam possit ingenio comprehendere, quam nec natura suis inclusit legibus?

Divi Ambrosii de Virginibus, Lib. 1.

‡ Qui eam servavit angelus est, qui perdidit, diabolus.

to the pains of child-birth, with the happy freedom of the consecrated maiden. He makes a very subtle and powerful address to parents, persuading them to atone for their own offences, by the early consecration of their virgin daughters; an exhortation which must have contributed very cruelly to increase the number of wretched and involuntary Old Maids, as many superstitious and selfish parents were undoubtedly ready to make their own peace with Heaven, at the expence of their unfortunate offspring.

Saint Ambrose mentions, with exultation, the swarms of pious damsels that hastened to receive the veil from his hand, not only from the neighbouring cities of Italy, but from the distant regions of Mauritania. He exhorts the young virgins to disregard all domestic impediments to their religious desires, and to embrace a monastic life in express opposition to the authority of their parents. He endeavours to justify this bold advice by a remarkable anecdote, which concludes

concludes the first division of his treatise, and which I shall copy, to render my fair readers acquainted with the singular style of this saint.—“ If you believe not the words
 “ of Heaven,” cries Ambrose, “ yet believe examples. In our memory, a dam-
 “ sel, once noble by her worldly rank, and
 “ now more ennobled by her attachment to
 “ God, being urged to marriage by her
 “ parents and relations, fled for refuge to
 “ the altar; and where can a virgin seek a
 “ better asylum, than that holy spot where
 “ the sacrifice of virginity is presented?
 “ But even here she was troubled with im-
 “ pious importunity. She stood by the altar
 “ of God as the offering of modesty, as
 “ the victim of continence. ‘ Why are you
 “ so anxious for my nuptials?’ she exclaimed to her relations—‘ I am betrothed al-
 “ ready. You offer me a husband, but I
 “ have found a better. Exaggerate the
 “ riches, boast the nobility, proclaim the
 “ power, of the party you propose; I have
 “ chosen

“ chosen *Him* to whom no one can be com-
“ pared; rich in the world, powerful in
“ dominion, pre-eminent in heaven. If
“ you have such to offer, I do not refuse the
“ option; but if you find not such, your
“ conduct towards me is rather envious
“ than provident.’—One of her relations,
“ observing the rest were silenced, abruptly
“ said, ‘ What if your father were living,
“ would he suffer you to remain unmar-
“ ried?’—The virgin answered, with new
“ religious fervour, and more temperate
“ piety, ‘ On this account, perhaps, he
“ died, that he might not prove an impe-
“ diment to the sanctity of his daughter.’—
“ This reply concerning her father proved
“ a kind of prophecy to her relation, as
“ he also expired soon after it, and the vir-
“ gin succeeded in her holy purpose. Ob-
“ serve, ye maidens, this reward of devo-
“ tion! Beware, ye parents, of a similar of-
“ fence!”

Saint Ambrose, having thus magnified
the excellence of virginity in the first divi-
sion

sion of his discourse, proposes, in the second, to instruct the young virgin in the particulars of her duty; and, to guard himself from the imputation of arrogance, he offers to his fair disciples, not a collection of severe precepts, but of splendid examples. Having exhorted them to imitate the humility of the Virgin Mary, and the fortitude of the martyr Thecla, he relates a recent instance of female chastity and resolution in the interesting adventures that beset a young and beautiful virgin of Antioch, who, on her refusal to worship the Pagan Divinities, was dragged into a public brothel, where her chastity was exposed to the most imminent danger, but was happily preserved by the fervour of her eloquence, and the sincerity of her virtue. She made a convert and a friend of the heathen soldier who had taken an active part in the outrage she endured, and inspired her persecutor with such pity and esteem, that he attempted, at the hazard of his own life, to preserve the purity which he had designed to violate. By an exchange

of dress, he contrived the escape of the virgin, but was himself condemned to die for the pious deception. The heroic virgin bravely rushed from her concealment to intercept the fate of her generous deliverer. They mutually contended for the glory of dying for each other. Their religious heroism was derided by the barbarity of persecution, and the only indulgence they obtained, was that of perishing together.

It is remarkable, that this pathetic little story has employed the pen of a famous French poet, and of an English philosopher of equal eminence. The *Theodore* of Corneille, as he informs us himself, was founded on this anecdote related by St. Ambrose; and, among the juvenile works of our great Boyle, we find the martyrdom of Theodora and Didymus. But the tragedy of the sublime poet, and the narrative of the benevolent philosopher, are both sunk into similar neglect; a circumstance sufficiently accounted for by a lively remark of Voltaire, who observes, very justly, on this play of

Corneille, that "he chose the subject because he had more genius than taste;" an observation, perhaps, as applicable to the English philosopher as to the French poet; and certainly still more applicable to the Latin saint; for Ambrose has related these adventures in a quaint and conceited style, full of indecency and affectation. I have therefore declined a translation of the passage, from the persuasion that my readers would be more entertained by a shorter and more simple recital of this affecting story. I shall add to it the curious remarks which Corneille has made on St. Ambrose, to console himself for the ill success of his tragedy. —" * Certainly," says this great, though unequal poet, "we may congratulate ourselves

* Certes il y a de quoi congratuler à la pureté de notre théâtre, de voir qu'une histoire qui fait le plus bel ornement du second livre des Vierges de Saint Ambroise, se trouve trop licentieuse pour y être supportée. Qu'eût-on dit, si, comme ce grand docteur de l'église, j'eusse fait voir Theodore dans le lieu infâme, si

“ selves on the purity of our theatre, in see-
 “ ing that a story which forms the most
 “ beautiful ornament in St. Ambrose’s se-
 “ cond book upon virgins, is found too li-
 “ centious to be endured. What would
 “ they have said, if, like that great doctor
 “ of the church, I had exhibited Theodora
 “ in a house of infamy, if I had described
 “ the various agitations of her soul while
 “ she remained in that scene, if I had ex-
 “ pressed the trouble that she felt in the
 “ moment when she saw Didymus enter ?
 “ It is here that this great saint displays
 “ the triumph of his eloquence, it is for
 “ this spectacle that he particularly invites
 “ the virgins to open their eyes.”

j’eusse décrit les diverses agitations de son ame durant
 qu’elle y fut, si j’eusse figuré les troubles qu’elle y
 ressentit au premier moment qu’elle y vit entrer Di-
 dyme ? C’est là-dessus que ce grand saint fait triom-
 pher son éloquence, & c’est pour ce spectacle qu’il in-
 vite particulièrement les vierges à ouvrir les yeux.

Corneille, edit. de Voltaire,
 tom. iii. p. 143.

Such

Such are the reflections of Corneille, in the epistle dedicatory to his unfortunate Theodora; and doubtless it was a consolation to the poet, in his recent disgrace, to recollect that he was infinitely more delicate than the canonized archbishop of Milan.

In truth, the ancient fathers of the church were so free in their anecdotes and expressions, that, in giving the most guarded account of their discourses, I am not without fear of sometimes offending my more dainty readers; but if that misfortune should happen to me, I earnestly conjure them to let their censure fall, not on the humble undignified author of this Essay, but on those high and hallowed prelates, whose compositions on this nice topic I thought myself obliged to review. I would not willingly admit into this chaste work a single expression that could force even the prudes to blush; but if those ladies of nice imagination should ever find me betrayed into such an offence, I intreat them, instead of censuring me, to congratulate themselves on the happy re-

finement of the times, in which it is impossible to transcribe the compositions of many a saint, without incurring the charge of indelicacy.

The third book of St. Ambrose opens with a recital of many pious precepts, delivered to Marcellina, the sister of our saint, by the pope Liberius, on the day when she received the veil from his hands. The points which the pontiff particularly recommended were, temperance and taciturnity; the latter is perpetually enjoined by the fathers, as one of the capital perfections in a consecrated virgin. St. Ambrose pays his sister the compliment of acknowledging, that her virtue had not only equalled, but even exceeded, the discipline of Liberius, and specifies her great merit in the articles of abstinence and prayer. Yet, notwithstanding the extreme sanctity of her character, he presents to her a long admonition concerning the dangers that attend the gaiety of nuptial entertainments, and the wanton enormity of dancing. He then answers a question

question of Marcellina's, on a very delicate subject, Whether the religion which forbids self-destruction, allows the virgin to destroy her own life for the preservation of her faith and her virginity? St. Ambrose decides the point, by the example of Pelagia, a virgin of Antioch, who, at the age of fifteen, threw herself into a river to escape from licentious persecution. The particulars of Pelagia's death are singularly striking, and the flourishes of St. Ambrose, in relating her story, not less so. The spirit of this young martyr induced her virgin sisters, and even her mother, to share her fate. St. Ambrose describes this heroic family advancing hand in hand, to the brink of a torrent, with their persecutors behind them; and he makes these undaunted females address the river in the following expressions:—"Be-
 " hold the water! who forbids us to be
 " baptized? Let the water receive us,
 " which is the source of regeneration—let
 " the water receive us, by which virgins
 " are made—let the water receive us,
 C 4 " which

“ which opens heaven, closes hell, hides
 “ death, and produces martyrs*.”—The
 faint relates, that they added to this address
 a short prayer for the decent preservation
 of their bodies; “ after which,” says he,
 “ unbinding their garments, so as to guard
 “ their modesty, and yet leave their steps
 “ free, and then joining hands, as if to
 “ lead a dance, they plunged together, into
 “ the deepest part of the flood†.”

Besides the example of Pelagia, St. Ambrose reminds his sister of the resolution displayed by a chaste female of their own

* Ecce aqua! Quis nos baptizari prohibet? Excipiat nos aqua, quæ regenerare consuevit—excipiat nos aqua, quæ virgines facit—excipiat nos aqua, quæ cælum aperit, inferos tegit, mortem abscondit, martyres reddit.

† Incincto sinu quo pudorem tegerent, nec gressum impedirent, confertis manibus, tanquam choros ducerent, in medium progrediuntur alveum; ubi unda torrentior, ubi profundum abruptius, illò vestigia dirigentes.

Divi Ambrosii de Virg. lib. iii.

family, who perished, he says, in the severest tortures without a groan or a tear.

In the close of his elaborate treatise, St. Ambrose enters into a long and very warm vindication of his own conduct. He had been accused, it seems (and certainly with justice) of alluring young maidens to relinquish the natural idea of settling themselves in marriage, and to take the monastic vow. Instead of denying, he glories in the charge. "Can that conduct," exclaims the faint, "be considered as a crime in me, " which has always reflected honour on the " priesthood, to sow the seeds of perfection, " and promote an attachment to virginity?" — He then proceeds to examine, whether his doctrine can be censured, either as dishonest, or new, or unprofitable; and his reasoning on these three points is highly curious:—"If you call it dishonest," says the faint, "you must also apply that appellation to the life of the angels; for they " neither marry, nor are given in marriage. " Can it be condemned as a novelty? I " consent

“ consent to abjure all things as novelties,
“ which are not taught us by Christ; but
“ does he not deliver the same doctrine,
“ when he says, ‘ There are eunuchs which
“ have made themselves eunuchs for the
“ kingdom of heaven *.’ Virginity is
“ therefore sanctified by a celestial voice,
“ and recommended by the precepts of our
“ Lord. — But since we have thus proved,
“ that the doctrine of continence is neither
“ dishonest nor new, let us enquire if it can
“ be reckoned unprofitable. I have heard
“ many people exclaim, that the world is
“ perishing—that the human race will be-
“ come extinct — that wedlock is ruined.
“ I only ask, in reply, did ever any man
“ seek a wife without being able to find
“ one?—If any one thinks that the human
“ race will be diminished by the consecra-
“ tion of virgins, let him consider, that
“ where there are few virgins, there are
“ fewer men. Where the devotion to vir-

* Matth. chap. xix.

“ ginity

“ginity is frequent, there the number of
 “men is much greater. Observe what
 “multitudes are annually admitted to the
 “veil in the churches of the East, and of
 “Africa. The men born in this country,
 “are fewer than the virgins that are conse-
 “crated there *.”

With the citation of this curious fact, I shall close my account of St. Ambrose's larger treatise on virgins, as the residue of that work consists only of passages from scripture very whimsically united.

The second composition of our illustrious saint, on this interesting topic, is entitled, “An Exhortation to Virgins.” It was written as a compliment to Juliana, an opulent widow, who, having devoted her whole family, consisting of a son and three daughters, to a religious life, employed her fortune in build-

* *Discite quantas Alexandrina, totiusque Orientis, et Africana ecclesia, quotannis sacrare consueverint. Pauciores hic homines prodeunt quam illic virgines consecrantur.* Divi Ambros. de Virg. lib. iii.

ing

ing a church at Florence, which she requested St. Ambrose to consecrate. Upon this ceremony the saint introduces Juliana in his discourse, extolling to her children the excellence of virginity in opposition to marriage. He makes her declare, that although she had a good husband, she laments that she was ever married; and that nothing can console her for having forfeited, in her own person, the grace of virginity, but the hope of proving the mother of holy virgins. But the most remarkable passage in this singular work is a very whimsical pun. St. Ambrose, deriving the word *nubere*, to marry, from *nubes*, a cloud, pursues his conceit with great solemnity, and gravely demonstrates the similitude between a married woman and a heavy exhalation *. The discourse contains many sentiments and pre-

* Et verè graves nubes, quæ sustinent sarcinam matrimonii. Nam etiam gravari alvo feruntur, cum femina conceptionis acceperint.

Divi Ambrosii ad Virg. Exhortatio,
p. 108. edit. Basil.

cepts, exactly similar to those of the preceding treatise, and concludes with an encomium on the piety of Juliana.

The third work, which St. Ambrose devoted to the holy sisterhood, has two different titles, being sometimes called *The Institution of a Virgin*, and sometimes, *A Discourse on the perpetual Virginity of the Virgin Mary*, which St. Ambrose very zealously supported against Bonosus, a bishop condemned by the council of Capua, for the opposite opinion. The saint alledges six arguments in favour of the point which he intends to prove; but, as the Catholic critics justly observe that some of these arguments have more wit than solidity, I shall decline an account of them, from a reverence to the hallowed personage of whom they speak.

C H A P. III.

*On St. Chrysoftom, and his Panegyric on
Virginity.*

IF the pious virgins of Italy had reason to admire the zeal which the holy Ambrose displayed in their behalf, those of Constantinople enjoyed a patron and pastor yet more admirable in the famous St. Chrysoftom, who equalled the archbishop of Milan in his enthusiastic veneration for celibacy, with the insinuating advantage of a superior eloquence. This talent, from which he received the appellation of Chrysoftom, or the golden mouth, had raised him from the condition of a sequestered monk, to preside over the clergy of the Eastern empire: but his elevation, though propitious to his glory, was fatal to his peace. The austerity of a hermit was ill suited to the manners of a corrupt metropolis. The inflexible

flexible prelate engaged in a dangerous quarrel with the empress Eudoxia, and, after sustaining his episcopal office nine years, under the vicissitudes of triumph and disgrace, he expired in 407, at the age of sixty, and in the midst of hardships inflicted on him as a persecuted exile.

I have already had occasion to quote some passages from this accomplished saint, in speaking of the unorthodox cohabitation of priests and virgins; a licentious, or at least an offensive custom, which Chrysostom had the honour of suppressing, by his eloquent invectives. In these we have seen, that the holy father bestowed on virginity the most magnificent praise; but I am yet to give an account of a long and regular panegyric, which he composed expressly on this favourite topic.

He opens this elaborate treatise with a severe condemnation of all heretical virgins, whom he sinks to a condition below that of the Christian adulterers. He uncharitably represents the Pagan Old Maid as an immediate

diate minister of the devil; nay, he will not allow that she could be a virgin; for, although her person was pure, yet her soul, the more important part, was corrupted:—

“ And what,” cries the animated saint, “ what is the advantage, if the temple be “ demolished, that the vestibule stands en- “ tire?”

He proceeds, with great subtlety, to shew, “ that he who condemns marriage, dimi- “ nishes the glory of true virginity; and “ that he who praises wedlock, does the “ highest honour to celibacy: for that “ which is considered as good, on a com- “ parison with evil, may be not eminently “ good; but that which is better than “ a blessing of universal estimation, must be “ supremely excellent; and in this light,” continues the saint, “ we recommend vir- “ ginity. Matrimony is good; and on this “ account virginity is marvellous, because “ it is better than good *; and, if you wish

* Καλον ο γαμος και δια τωτο η παρθενια θαυμαστον
 οτι καλε κρεϊττον εστι.

Sanct. Chryf. tom. iv. p. 322. edit. Par,

“ it,

“ it, I will inform you how far it is better ;
 “ as much as heaven is better than earth,
 “ and angels than men.”

In this comparifon, St. Chryfoftom only echoes the fentiment and expreffion which we have already feen in more than one of his predeceffors : but this eloquent encomiaft of virginity was of a fpirit too animated to content himfelf with a fervile repetition, and we accordingly find him purfuing this idea, with addrefs and vigour peculiar to himfelf.

After faying, that virginity is as much fuperior to wedlock, as angels are to men, he exclaims, “ Or, to fpeak with juft energy,
 “ yet more ; for the angels, if they neither
 “ marry nor are given in marriage, are not
 “ compounded of flefh and blood ; they
 “ have no fettlement on earth, they feel not
 “ the perturbations of defire. They neither
 “ hunger nor thirft, they have no organs
 “ which can be foftened by mufic or fascinated by beauty ; but, as the meridian
 “ fky, where no clouds are collected, ap-
 Vol. III. D “ pears

“ pears pure, so their nature, unclouded by
“ mortal passions, must of necessity be clear
“ and lucid.”

The faint proceeds to shew, that virgins, under the disadvantage of mortality, engage in a successful competition with these celestial spirits, and equal them in purity and perfection. —“ But this,” he exclaims with indignation, “ this touches not you, ye
“ worldlings, who waste this lovely treasure! —the portion of the unprofitable
“ servant is reserved for you: but to the
“ virgins of the church, many and great
“ rewards shall be allotted, such as neither
“ eye nor ear can perceive, nor human understanding comprehend.”

He then attempts to refute the objections which have been urged against celibacy, by affirming, that marriage is by no means necessary for the preservation and continuance of the human race; and, as a proof of this, he asserts (what other faints have also maintained) that Adam had no connubial intercourse

course with Eve, till after their expulsion from Paradise.

He goes yet farther, and affirms, it is not virginity, but sin, that has a tendency to diminish and destroy the human species, and supports his remark by the history of the deluge.

The saint proceeds to make many severe reflections on those who treat virginity with contempt. He expatiates on the excellence and the merits of the maidenly condition. He dwells on the severe bondage of wedlock, and particularly on the hard case of that wife who may wish to live in a state of continence, and yet cannot lawfully refuse those caresses to which she has no inclination. He contrasts the single and the married life in every point of view, and uniformly decides in favour of the first.

C H A P. IV.

*On St. Jerom, and his various Compositions in
Praise of Virginity.*

I SHALL close my catalogue of holy panegyriste with the mention of a saint who was equal, and perhaps superior, to all his sainted brethren, in extent of learning, in vigour of genius, and, above all, in vehemence of zeal for the support of virginity. I mean the passionate and the witty St. Jerom, who passed a great part of his singular life either in struggling with his own turbulent desires in a lonely wilderness, or in preaching continence to the devout and rich ladies of a luxurious city. He was born about the year 345, on the confines of Dalmatia, received his education at Rome, and travelled into Gaul. He then proposed to settle in the metropolis of Italy, but the religious activity of his spirit soon hurried him

him into the East ; and, having visited the most hallowed places of that country, he devoted himself to a state of severest mortification in the deserts of Syria. Sickness drove him to Antioch ; from thence he was led to Constantinople by his desire of conversing with St. Gregory Nazianzen. Ecclesiastical business now carried him to Rome, and it was at this advanced period of his life that he became the favourite preceptor of many Roman ladies, who, while they attended his exhortations to chastity, were very wantonly censured for their devout familiarity with this eloquent enthusiast. The attachment of his female disciples, though probably very innocent, was undoubtedly very strong, as some of them followed him into the Holy Land, where he ended an unquiet but illustrious life, at the age of fourscore. Among these disciples, a widow, whose name was Paula, attracted the notice of the world by her rank and fortune, and still more by the fervency of her devotion. The ardent friendship which

St. Jerom professed for this lady had a considerable influence on his life and writings. What he suffered, and what he enjoyed, in the pious connection, he has himself very forcibly described, in a letter addressed to Asella, a religious maiden of peculiar sanctity. In speaking of the Roman ladies, he says, “ * I lived among them almost three
 “ years, and was frequently surrounded
 “ by a croud of virgins. To some I often
 “ explained the scripture. My lectures
 “ produced attention — attention, familiarity—
 “ and familiarity, confidence. But
 “ let them say if they ever observed in me
 “ any thing unbecoming a Christian. I accepted,
 “ indeed, the money of some; their
 “ presents, whether small or great, I did
 “ not

* Penè certè triennium cum eis vixi; multa me virginum crebrò turba circumdedit. Divinos libros, ut potui, nonnullis sæpè disserui. Lectio assiduitatem, assiduitas familiaritatem, familiaritas fiduciam fecerat. Dicant quid unquam in me aliter senserint quam Christianum decebat. Pecuniam cujusquam accepi; munera vel parva vel magna non sprevi: nihil mihi aliud

“ not despise ; yet nothing was ever al-
 “ ledged against me except my sex, and
 “ even that was never alledged against me,
 “ till Paula travelled to Jerusalem. Before
 “ I became familiar with the house of the
 “ holy Paula, I had gained the general ap-
 “ plause of the whole city ; and by the
 “ judgment of almost all, I was regarded
 “ as worthy the highest rank in the church.
 “ I was called a saint, I was called humble
 “ and eloquent. — Did I ever enter the
 “ doors of any gay or wanton lady ? Were
 “ silk and jewels, a painted face, and a præ-
 “ fusion of gold, any attractions to me?—
 “ There was no matron of Rome who
 “ could

aliud obicitur nisi sexus meus ; et hoc nunquam obji-
 tur, nisi quum Jerosolymam Paula proficiscitur. Ante-
 quam domum sanctæ Paulæ nossem, totius in me urbis
 studia consonabant ; omnium penè judicio dignus
 summo sacerdotio decernebar. Dicebar sanctus, di-
 cebar humilis et disertus. Numquid domum alicujus
 lascivioris ingressus sum ? numquid me vestes sericæ,
 nitentes gemmæ, picta facies, auri rapuit ambitio ?
 Nulla fuit alia Romæ matronarum quæ meam posset

“ could conquer my mind, except her dis-
 “ tinguished by mourning and mortifica-
 “ tion, coarse in her attire, and almost
 “ blind with weeping—whom the sun often
 “ finds imploring, through successive nights,
 “ the mercy of her God—whose songs are
 “ psalms—whose conversation, the gospel
 “ —whose luxury, continence—whose life
 “ a fast. No woman could delight me, ex-
 “ cept her whom I never beheld in the act
 “ of eating: but as soon as I began to es-
 “ teem, to revere, and look up to her for
 “ the merit of her chastity, from that mo-
 “ ment all my own virtues forsook me.”

The saint proceeds to vent his indignation against the envy and malice of those

edomare mentem, nisi lugens atque jejunans, squalens
 fordibus, fletibus penè cæcata; quam continuis
 noctibus misericordiam Domini deprecantem sol sæpè
 deprehendit; cujus canticum psalmi, sermo evangelium;
 deliciæ continentia, vita jejunium. Nulla me potuit
 alia delectare, nisi illa quam manducantem nunquam
 vidi; sed postquam eam pro suæ merito castitatis
 venerari, colere, suscipere cœpi, omnes me illicò
 deseruere virtutes.

Sanct. Hieron. tom. iv. p. 66.

who

who had accused him of a criminal intrigue
 with this devout lady ; and he closes his letter
 with all the animation of injured innocence,
 professing, in spite of the censorious world,
 an everlasting attachment both to the widow
 Paula, and her maiden daughter Eustochium.
 To the latter he has addressed one of his most
 remarkable compositions ; and of this I shall
 now give a brief account. It is intitled, " An
 Epistle on the Preservation of Virginitv."—" I do
 " not intend in this discourse," says the saint
 to his fair disciple, " to rehearse to you
 " the praises of that maidenly condition,
 " which you have found to be most excellent,
 " nor to enumerate the troubles of
 " matrimony. There will be no adulation
 " in this little treatise, no rhetorical pomp
 " of language, which may invest you with
 " the dignity of an angel, and, by describing
 " the beatitude of virginitv, lay the
 " world at your feet. I do not wish that
 " the life you have embraced should inspire
 " you with pride, but with caution :
 " you

“ you travel, laden with treasure, it is there-
 “ fore your business to avoid a thief *.”

After this friendly admonition, the saint proceeds to speak of the incessant danger to which virginity is exposed; and, to alarm his tender pupil in the highest degree, he says, with a temerity of language which his zeal, I think, can hardly excuse, “ Though
 “ God is all powerful, he cannot raise up a
 “ virgin that is ruined. He is able, indeed,
 “ to deliver her from punishment; but
 “ he will not bestow a crown on the cor-
 “ rupted †. Virginity,” continues the saint,
 “ may even perish by the simple offences
 “ of the mind, and be lost only by har-
 “ bouring a licentious idea.”—St. Jerom is very candid, in adding to this rigid maxim a striking history of his own turbu-

* Onusta incedis auro, latro tibi vitandus est.

Epist. ad Eustoch.

† Audenter loquar : quum omnia possit Deus, suscitare virginem non potest post ruinam. Valet quidem liberare de pœna, sed non vult coronare corruptam.

Epist. ad Eustoch.

lent

lent and wanton thoughts in the wilderness to which he retired. In spite of the severe mortifications by which he there endeavoured to subdue the propensities of nature, in the midst of fasting, solitude, and prayer, his ardent imagination, he confesses, hurried him from the silent desert to scenes of Roman luxury, and the society of girls. From this honest confession, he draws a forcible argument in favour of temperance.—“ If they,” says the saint, “ who reduce
 “ their bodies by abstinence, are thus tormented by their fancy, what must the
 “ damsel suffer, who is indulged in every
 “ delicacy? If, therefore, I have any right
 “ to advise, if you can credit experience,
 “ this is my first admonition, this my most
 “ earnest intreaty, that the consecrated virgin may fly from wine as from poison.”
 —The saint expatiates on the necessity of abstinence, both as to food and liquor; and he concludes his advice on this topic with these remarkable expressions:—“ It
 “ is not that Heaven is delighted with the

“ rumbling of our intestines, but chastity
 “ cannot otherwise be safe *.”

This caution is followed by a very striking picture of the dissolute manners which prevailed in that age. The ladies and the clergy are treated with equal severity by the indignant Jerom; their vices are described with that singular vehemence of angry wit, that energy of metaphor, by which the writings of this eloquent father are peculiarly distinguished: “ I am ashamed
 “ to say,” exclaims the animated saint,
 “ how many virgins are daily ruined!
 “ what illustrious maidens are lost from the
 “ very bosom of our mother church! over
 “ what fallen stars the proud enemy rears
 “ his throne †!” He proceeds to strike at

* Non quod Deus intestinorum nostrorum rugitu delectetur, sed quod aliter pudicitia tuta esse non possit.

Epist. ad Eustoch.

† Pudet dicere quot quotidie virgines ruant, quantas de suo gremio mater perdat ecclesia, super quæ sydera inimicus superbus ponat thronum suum; quot petras excavet, et habitet coluber in foraminibus earum.

the

the cohabitation, that I have mentioned before, between the priests and the canonical virgins: "How was this pest," cries the angry Jerom, "introduced into the church? " whence are these harlots, who confine " themselves to a single man? They are " contained in the same house, in one " chamber, aye, and often in one little bed, " and yet call us suspicious if we suppose " any thing *."

The saint proceeds to contrast with these licentious manners the extreme purity of his young disciple, in which he exhorts her to persevere with various precepts; he dwells chiefly on abstinence and nightly prayer. He recommends to her several authors, who had written on virgins—Tertullian, St. Cyprian, his friend Damasus the Roman pontiff, who celebrated virginity both in prose and verse, but, above all, the treatise of St.

* Unde in ecclesias Agapetarum pestis introiit? unde meretrices univiræ? Eadem domo, uno cubiculo, sæpè uno tenenter et lectulo, et suspiciosos nos vocant, si aliquid existimamus. Epist. ad Eustoch.

Ambrose,

Ambrose, of which I have given an account, and which St. Jerom extols as a master-piece of eloquence. He cautions her, at the same time, against all profaner studies, and particularly the amusement of poetry.

There is a very pleasing peculiarity in this generous saint; I mean, his custom of relating a little history of his own frailties, to form a more forcible lesson for the use of his disciple. Of this we have already seen one example, in the narration of his wanton thoughts in the desert. A second now occurs, on the subject of profane literature. He confesses to his fair pupil, that, after spending some time in his sacred studies, in fasting and prayer, he used to amuse himself with the comedies of Plautus, which delighted him so much, that when he returned to the perusal of the prophets, he found them insufferably dull. A fever attacked him, and, at the height of his distemper, he was transported, in a vision, before the tribunal of a judge, who, upbraiding him

him for his attachment to the literature of the Gentiles, commanded him to be scourged. The conscious Jerom acknowledges the justice of this sentence, and supports the reality of his punishment, by appealing to the stripes which he continued, he says, to feel after his sleep had left him.

In speaking of literature, St. Jerom has some curious expressions concerning the literary magnificence of his age. "Parch-ment," says he, "is tinged with purple, gold flows into letters, and books are arrayed in jewels." He ascribes this passion for splendor to the Roman ladies, whom he represents, in general, as full of ostentation, and destitute of virtue.

From hence he takes occasion to put his fair disciple on her guard against luxury and avarice.

At the distance of thirty years from the composition of these instructions to the tender Eustochium, we find the ardent St. Jerom addressing, with the same zeal for chastity,

chastity, another Roman virgin, of equal or superior eminence; I mean the celebrated Demetrias, the grand-daughter of Proba, a matron of the highest rank and character in Rome, who, flying from that city, when it was taken by the Goths, escaped with her family, and the wreck of an immense fortune, to the coast of Africa. The young and lovely Demetrias—inflamed with a pious passion for the palm of virginity, or alarmed, perhaps, by the fate of many illustrious Roman damsels, torn from their exiled parents, and basely sold to Syrian merchants by the infamous Count Heraclian, who commanded in Africa—sought an asylum in the church, by assuming the veil. The holy maiden was complimented by the most eminent saints of the age on this act of devotion. Nothing can more forcibly shew the high consequence of canonical virgins in that period, than the epistle of St. Jerom to Demetrias. After some praise bestowed on her own character, and that of her family, he represents her consecration as
an

an event which diffused such universal joy throughout the Roman world, that it compensated in a great measure the late overthrow of the imperial city. He affirms, that the delight and exultation of the Roman people, on this occasion, were superior to what they had formerly displayed, both when their country was delivered from the ravages of the Gauls, and when, after the fatal battles of Trebia, Thrasymene, and Cannæ, they first heard of the victory which Marcellus obtained at Nola. This, surely, is one of the most hyperbolical compliments that was ever paid to a fair devotee, and affords us a curious proof how far the imagination of our lively saint would sometimes outrun his judgment. But though his zeal has overcharged the picture, we must remember that he painted from life : and his description of the effects produced by the consecration of this noble damsel, exhibits in the strongest light the maidenly enthusiasm of that period. After declaring that the joy of Demetrias's family was such

as the eloquence both of Cicero and Demosthenes would be unequal to describe, St. Jerom exclaims, " Good God, what
 " was their exultation ! as from one fruitful
 " root many virgins shot forth* ; a
 " multitude of female dependants pursued
 " the example of their lady ; the profession
 " of virginity prevailed in every house †.
 " I speak too faintly : all the churches of
 " Africa exulted ; the fame of the pious
 " virgin pervaded every city, every town,
 " every village, to the most lonely hut ; all
 " the islands between Africa and Italy were
 " filled with the joyful tidings. Then Italy
 " threw off her garb of mourning, and the
 " half-demolished walls of Rome recovered
 " a part of their pristine splendor, her God
 " being deemed propitious in this perfect
 " conversion of her daughter. You would

* Quasi ex radice fecunda, multæ simul virgines pullulârunt.

† Per omnes domos fervebat virginitatis professio. Parum loquor, &c.

Sanct. Hieron. Epist. ad Demetriadem.

" have

“ have thought the race of Goths extinguished, and all her base enemies struck dead by the avenging thunder of heaven.”

Having represented the effects of her consecration in these flattering colours, St. Jerom proceeds to favour this illustrious virgin with many precepts for the maintenance of her purity. He dwells on the usual topics of temperance and prayer. He ingeniously compares the virgin, who lives chastely in the warmth of youth, to those holy persons who continued unhurt in the fiery furnace. To the rich virgin he observes, that it is more meritorious to employ a large fortune in charitable donations to the poor, than in building a costly and splendid church. He advises his fair pupil to amuse herself with manual work. He cautions her against the insidious doctrine of the heretic Rufinus. He exhorts her never to hear any conversation between a man and his wife, as such dialogues are of

an infectious nature*. “ Chuse her for
 “ your companion,” says the faint, “ who
 “ never suspects that she is handsome; who
 “ never throws back her cloak to discover
 “ her neck, but covers even her face so
 “ carefully, that she has hardly one eye,
 “ when she is walking in public, suffi-
 “ ciently unveiled to discern her path.”

The faint then speaks of his own former composition on the preservation of virginity; a work, he says, which raised to him many enemies, on account of the honest freedom with which he arraigned the vices of the time. He is still, however, equally severe on female licentiousness: “ Many,” says he, “ affect the sanctity of canonical
 “ virgins, that they may more quietly in-
 “ dulgetheir impure desires. These things,” continues the faint, “ we see and suffer,
 “ and, when dazzled by a piece of gold,

* Ne audias quid vel maritus uxori, vel uxor locuta sit viro: venenatæ sunt hujuscemodi confabulationes.

Epist. ad Demet.

“ we

“ we even rank them in the catalogue of “ good works*.” He concludes with exhorting his chaste disciple to love the scripture; and, what has a ludicrous tendency to overthrow all his favourite doctrine, he entreats her to revere her *grandmother* as a model of perfection.

The respectful love which St. Jerom* had conceived for virginity was so great, that it appears to have been the ruling passion of his life, and may be traced in almost all his writings. In his letters to different friends, who had consulted him on the education of their female infants, he discovers the most ardent and anxious desire to form, from the cradle, a religious Old Maid. In advising a lady, whose name was Læta, to teach her little daughter to read by letters of box or ivory, he gives her a particular caution to let no boys come near the infant maiden. The whole letter is curious, as it circum-

* Hæc videmus et patimur, et si aureus nummus affulserit, inter bona opera deputamus.

stantially describes the very singular cautions which St. Jerom thought necessary to form a female character of accomplished purity.—But I must hasten to speak of the two more elaborate works of this saint, in which his predominant passion may be said to burst forth with the greatest fervency. The first of these is a treatise on the perpetual virginity of the Virgin Mary, in opposition to Helvidius, who had attempted to prove, by passages from the gospel, that, after the birth of our Saviour, the Virgin Mary had other children by her husband Joseph. After replying to all the arguments of his adversary with great acuteness and strength of reason, St. Jerom indulges himself in a rhetorical description of the two opposite characters, a virgin and a wife; and he concludes his treatise by magnifying the pre-eminence of the former with all the lively spirit of eloquent enthusiasm.—The second is a work, in which the zeal of our saint, for the honour of virginity, arose to a still higher pitch; I mean his answer to Jovinian.

Jovinian. This Italian monk, of a moderate and respectable character, had very candidly asserted, that the married women and virgins, who lived in equal obedience to the laws of the gospel, were equally meritorious. The indignation of the zealous Jerom took fire at this assertion; he could not bear that those objects of his idolatry, the pure virgins of the church, should be thus placed on a level with women debased, in his idea, even by a legal cohabitation with man. He is so hurried on by the vehemence of his anger, that he exclaims, in the opening of his reply, "How shall I check myself, and not indulge the weapon so impatient to strike in the cause of virginity*?" Indeed, the warm saint appears utterly unable to conduct the controversy with any degree of temper. Comparing the candid doctrine of his adversary

* Unde cohibebo cursum, nec indulgebo mucroni jam nunc pro virginitate ferire cupienti?

S. Hieron. adversus Jovinianum, lib. i.

to the hissing of the old serpent, he threatens to crush him as the most vile and pernicious of reptiles.

The passionate compositions of a bold and vigorous mind, enriched with extensive learning, are generally entertaining, though full of error and absurdity. There is an attractive energy in satirical wit, however destitute of truth, when it is sharpened by indignation or envy. It is owing, perhaps, in some measure, to this forcible charm, that some unjust compositions of two very different authors, Voltaire and Dr. Johnson, have been read with peculiar avidity. In many strokes of personal character, and in the compact vigour of their style, these great writers both resembled St. Jerom. Sarcastic imagination and literary pride were, perhaps, the predominant characteristics of this singular triumvirate; they all delighted to exert the talent which they all possessed, of blowing an adversary to pieces with a sparkling explosion of irritable wit.

The

The mild and unfortunate Jovinian, though he had mercy and justice on his side, sunk under the vindictive eloquence of St. Jerom, who supported against his antagonist the pre-eminence of his favourite virginity by a variety of arguments, and a torrent of sacred and profane erudition. The saint very artfully perverts many texts of scripture to his purpose, and from some of them draws a wonderful inference against the purity of matrimonial duties *. He dwells on the authority of St. Paul, in his famous exhortation to celibacy. He affirms that virgins are more beloved by heaven, because their sacrifice is not enjoined, but voluntary. He declares, there is as much difference between marriage and virginity, as between not sinning and doing good.

Having made the utmost of those texts

* Si abstinemus nos a coitu, honorem tribuimus uxoribus; si non abstinemus, perspicuum est honori contrariam esse contumeliam. Sanct. Hieron.

in scripture, which could be converted to the honour of virginity, he proceeds to shew, that a state of continence was no new establishment, introduced in opposition to nature by the Christian church, but of ancient and universal estimation. In this part of his treatise, he gives an ample catalogue of the most eminent supposed virgins of the Pagan world, not omitting the Camilla and Harpalice of Virgil. He mentions the tradition of the Indian Gymnosophists, that the founder of their religious institutions was generated from the side of a virgin. He condescends to repeat even the Grecian fable concerning Plato's mother, who was said to have been impregnated by a phantom of Apollo *.

There are several points of religious doctrine which St. Jerom disputes with his antagonist, but I touch only on that which is particularly connected with the subject of this Essay. This, indeed, is the point for which

* Phantasmate Apollinis.

the angry saint most vehemently contends. His indignation seems to have been particularly roused by the great eagerness with which the Roman ladies had embraced the liberal maxims of his opponent. Some canonical virgins, convinced by Jovinian of the innocence and the merits of matrimony, had dropped the veil, and preferred the warm protection of a husband, to the chilling shelter of the church. St. Jerom, in the close of his invective, very forcibly describes the popularity of his antagonist. He laments that the rich and noble received him with deference and affection. He represents him as the preceptor of impurity, surrounded by multitudes of lascivious women, who have lost, not only their modesty, but all sense of shame; "and who display more wantonness," says the saint, "in the argumentative defence of their desire, than in its actual exertion."—He concludes with a spirited address to Rome, as the mistress of the world. He beseeches the imperial city to act in conformity

formity to her ancient reputation, to be exalted by virtue, and not humbled by pleasure.

Though Jovinian seems to have had a large majority of the fair sex on his side, his mild doctrine concerning them was formally condemned by ecclesiastical authority, and he died in exile. St. Jerom arose triumphant from the contest; yet we find that many pious critics in Rome arraigned his composition, for extolling virginity to such a pitch, by the degradation of wedlock. In some of his letters he treats these critics with the utmost contempt. He asserts, in support of his own doctrine, that the apostles were either unmarried, or continent after marriage*. He concludes one of his epistles on this topic with an air of jocularitv, by saying, "To explain my sentiments on wedlock completely, I would have all those provide themselves with

* Apostoli vel virgines, vel post nuptias continentes. Sanct. Hieron. Epist. ad Pammachium, tom. iv. p. 242. edit. Par. 1705.

" wives,

“wives, who, from their nightly fears, are
“unable to lie alone *.”

Such was the doctrine, and such the success of St. Jerome, as the eulogist of virginity. It may amuse the English reader to see this eloquent and chaste enthusiast in the character of a poet; I shall therefore close the chapter with a translation of the epitaph which he composed on his great friend and patroness, the illustrious Paula.—This lady, after residing about twenty years in Bethlem, where she had founded three monasteries for virgins, and one for monks—and after acting as a mother to all the Christian pilgrims, who then crowded to the holy sepulchre—ended a life of the strictest piety, in the year 404, at the age of fifty-six.” The faithful St. Jerom lamented her with the most passionate affliction, and placed on different parts of the rock which

* Volo omnes, qui propter nocturnos forsitan metus soli cubitare non possunt, uxores ducere.

Sanct. Hieron. Epist. ad Dumnionem.

was converted into her tomb, the two following inscriptions.

** She, who from Scipio deriv'd her birth,
Paula, is laid within this hallow'd earth :
Her lineage from the Gracchi's splendid race,
And Agamemnon's royal house, we trace ;
Eustochium's mother, first of Roman dames !
But scorning worldly pride, and pompous names,
In Bethlem, sacred rural spot ! she chose
With Christian poverty her life to close.*

On the front of the cave.

*See you this stony sepulchre ? It hides
Paula's remains, who now in heaven resides.
Friends,*

** Scipio quam genuit, Pauli fudere parentes,
Gracchorum soboles, Agamemnonis inclyta proles,
Hoc jacet in tumulo ; Paulam dixere priores :
Eustochii genetrix, Romani prima senatûs !
Pauperiem Christi et Bethleemitica rura sequuta.*

In fronte speluncæ.

*Aspicias angustum præcisâ rupe sepulcrum ?
Hospitium Paulæ est, cœlestia regna tenentis.*

Fratrem,

*Friends, country, children, wealth—from all
she fled,*

To lay in Bethlem's holy rock her head:

Cradle of Christ! a scene the Magi trod,

Hailing, with mystic gifts, our Human God.

Fratrem, cognatos, Romam, patriamque relinquens,

Divitias, sobolem, Bethlemiti conditur antro.

Hic præsepe tuum, Christe, atque hic mystica Magi

Munera portantes, Hominique Deoque dedere.

Sanct. Hieron. tom. iv. p. 689.

C H A P. V.

On some Miracles ascribed to Monastic Virgins.

THE enthusiastic eloquence of the different saints, whom we have just reviewed, had undoubtedly great influence in augmenting the multitude of religious Old Maids. But it was not the only cause which produced this effect:—to the exhortations of the holy fathers we may add the universal and dazzling idea of supernatural power, supposed to reside in the monastic virgin of immaculate purity. Many females would enter with ambitious zeal into a state which gave them a fair prospect of acquiring the very flattering privilege of working miracles: and in those ages, when diverse miracles were ascribed to the chaste and pious daughters of many a convent, every nun of lively imagination, who had the slightest acquaintance with the legends
of

of her sisterhood, might readily hope for a privilege of which examples were so common. The lives of the female saints contain an infinitude of miraculous incidents in honour of virginity. My readers would hardly thank me for reviving a large collection of these forgotten wonders; yet let me observe, with the great Montesquieu *, “ that the lyes contained in these lives relate to the manners of the time:” and it forms a part of my design, to exhibit in this work the manners and sentiments of different ages, relating to that interesting condition of female life which I have chosen for my subject. Every author must allow a place to many absurdities, if he means to give a history of human opinions, though on a

* Je crois bien que c’est une fausseté (says this bold and manly writer, on a passage in the life of an obscure saint) mais c’est une fausseté très-ancienne: le fond de la vie et les mensonges se rapportent aux mœurs et aux loix du temps; et ce sont ces mœurs et ces loix que l’on cherche ici.

L’Esprit des Loix, lib. xxx. chap. 21.

single topic. The more ridiculous an ancient legend may appear to us, the more forcibly will it shew us the extent and influence of popular credulity. I shall, therefore, select a few supernatural anecdotes of pious virgins; and, to render them the more interesting, I shall confine myself to the holy maidens of our own country. If we wished to produce the strongest example of miraculous power ascribed to martyred chastity, we might pitch on the adventures of St. Ositha, a religious and royal virgin of Essex, who, being murdered and beheaded by Danish pirates, in the ninth century, is said, like some poetical heroes of romance, to have carried her severed head in her own hands to a church at a considerable distance from the spot where she was slain *.

* Dani infideles ipsam sanctam Ositham capite obtruncant : at corpus exangue mox sese subrigit, et caput humi jacens manibus apprehendit ; rectoque gradu et firmis vestigiis progrediens usque ad ecclesiam apostolorum sanctorum Petri et Pauli, per tria ferè stadia, illud deportat : quod accidit circa annum 870. Du Monstier, Martyrologium, p. 393.

The

The memory of this fair and chaste saint was held in peculiar veneration, as appears from a circumstance recorded in one of our early monastic chronicles. Alfward, bishop of London, was afflicted with a leprosy; and his distemper was supposed to be a punishment which he drew upon himself, by inspecting this buried virgin, whose body lay within his diocese, with a profane curiosity, and pilfering some reliques from her grave *.

Among the most meritorious of our holy maidens, we ought, perhaps, to reckon the chaste St. Bridget of Scotland, who, having resolved on perpetual virginity, and being persecuted by the addresses of an ardent lover, prayed to heaven that she might be relieved from his distressing importunities by the sudden loss of her beauty. Her pious

* Cum virginis martyris corpus ausu temerario inspicere, et aliquas inde reliquias auferre, presumeret, divino, ut creditur, judicio tantæ temeritatis pœnam solvit.

Historia Ramesiensis,

edit. Gale, p. 452.

biographers inform us, that this singular petition was immediately granted: — her lovely countenance was instantly deformed, and the dangerous lustre of her eyes was drowned in blood. But we have the consolation of being told, by the same authority, that she recovered her charms as soon as her purity was perfectly secure.

Not to dwell on the legends of mere martyrologists, I shall relate, from the most respectable of our ancient historians, a miraculous anecdote, which not only shews the wonderful estimation in which monastic virginity was held, but even proves that the king himself was not safe, if he presumed to question or deride the continence of a canonized virgin.

The celebrated William of Malmesbury has enlivened the history of English prelates with the following account of a religious and royal maiden, whose name was Editha. This lady, the daughter of Edgar, a monarch distinguished by his military spirit and his amorous adventures, was early devoted to a
life

life of monastic purity ; and is said to have displayed all the gentle virtues in the monastery of Wilton. Though a professed nun, she ventured to indulge herself in splendid apparel ; and when reproved by St. Ethelwold for her finery, she defended herself, with a pious vivacity, by a quotation from St. Augustin, affirming that pride was often seen in a fordid habit, and humility in a golden vest. In her devotions she was so fervent, that the great St. Dunstan, who beheld her during the consecration of a church which she had built, was enraptured with her piety. On observing, that she frequently extended her thumb, to make the sign of the cross, this prophetic saint exclaimed, “ May that blessed finger never decay ! ” and burst into a tender passion of tears, so violent as to shake with his sobbing the deacon who stood next him. On being asked the reason of his disorder, he replied, “ This blooming rose will soon
 “ wither ; this dove, so dear to heaven, will
 “ fly away from us in six weeks from this
 F 3 “ day.”

“ day.” His prophecy was accomplished: the royal virgin expired at the precise time he had foretold; and the same holy man beheld her in a vision, walking hand in hand with the sainted martyr to whom she had dedicated the church, and commanding that such reverence should be paid to her on earth as she received in heaven.—Miracles became frequent at her tomb. At last it was ordered that her body should be brought forth from its grave; and her whole frame was found converted into dust, except her finger, her stomach, and the parts below it. While the holy man was amazed at these wonders, he was relieved by an appearance of the virgin’s spirit, who said that those parts of her body were justly free from putrefaction, for having preserved themselves unpolluted by the two sensual sins of wantonness and gluttony *.

At

The curious reader may wish to see the whole account of this singular apparition, which I have softened and abridged,—*Ita crebrescentibus ad tum-
bam*

At a subsequent period, when king Canute the Dane, who was apt, says the same pious historian, to satirize the saints of England, happened to visit Wilton, he treated the memory of the chaste and holy Editha with jocular contempt; affirming, that he could never believe she was justly fainted for chastity, as she was the daughter of Edgar, the most wanton of princes. While he spoke thus with the irreverence of a barbarian, he was reprov'd by the archbishop Ednodus. Canute growing angry, orders the sepulchre to be opened, that he

bam miraculis, edictum ut efferretur virginis corpus; inventumque totum in cineres solutum, præter digitum et alvum, alvoque subjecta: unde sancto dubitanti virgo ipsa per visum assistit; dicens, non mirum esse si partes illæ corporis putruerint, quod usus habeat exanimata corpora in quosdam arcanos naturæ sinus defluere, et ipsa utpotè puella membris illis peccaverit; cæterum ventrem nulla corrumpi justè putredine, qui nulla unquam aculeatus sit libidine: immunem se fuisse crapulæ et carnalis copulæ.

Will. Malmf. de Gestis Pontificum,

lib. ii. p. 252.

might see what appearance of sanctity the dead virgin would discover. The mausoleum being burst asunder, the deceased, spreading her veil before her face as low as her girdle, was seen to arise and attack the insolent monarch *. Overcome with terror, throwing back his head, and losing the strength of his knees, he fell to the ground, and remained breathless so long, that he was supposed to be dead; but his faculties returning by degrees, he rejoiced to find that, although severely chastised, he had a season left him for penitence. The festival of the chaste Editha is therefore held venerable in many parts of England; and no one can think of profaning it with impunity.

Such are the anecdotes which the most sensible and accomplished of our ancient historians has related of one royal and pious maiden. Several incidents of a similar cast

* Effraeto ergo mausoleo, defuncta, oppanso ante faciem velo cingulo tenus, assurgere, et in contumacem regem impetum facere, visa.

might be easily collected; but I apprehend the preceding is sufficient to shew, in a very strong point of view, the ideas of our ancestors concerning the supernatural powers of a spotless virgin. What real influence such ideas may have had in augmenting the multitude of genuine Old Maids, I shall leave the contemplative sisterhood to consider.

C H A P. VI.

*On the Decline and Fall of Monastic Vir-
ginity.*

AGES have existed, in which a passion for monastic chastity appears to have spread, like an epidemical disorder, through the female world; and ladies of the most elevated rank seem to have been particularly exposed to this *religious influenza*. The great historian, who has lately exhibited a magnificent picture of declining Rome, delineates, with his usual spirit, the pious pomp and ostentation with which the three daughters of the emperor Arcadius dedicated their virginity to God. He informs us, that “ the obligation of their
“ vow was inscribed on a tablet of gold
“ and gems, which they publicly offered
“ in the great church of Constantinople;
“ their palace was converted into a monas-
“ tery;

“ tery ; and all males, except the guides of
 “ their conscience, the saints who had for-
 “ gotten the distinction of sexes, were scru-
 “ pulously excluded from the holy thresh-
 “ old *.”

A female sacrifice announced to the world with such dazzling splendor, must have had great effect in extending the contagious passion for monastic virginity ; and, in the succeeding ages, we find that many queens and princesses, in different kingdoms of Europe, preferred the chaste comfort of monastic continence to all the parade and pleasure of royal dignity. We have seen, in a former chapter of this Essay, that the married royal fair ones, as well as the single, aspired to that celestial crown of virginity, which was considered as superior to every earthly diadem ; and many of these virgin wives (to give them the strange appellation which they coveted) appear to have obtained, from the religious complaisance of their husbands,

* Gibbon, vol. iii. p. 315. edit. 1781.

a very plausible, if not an unquestionable title to the prime object of their ambition. In this wonderful species of purity, the royal fair ones of England seem to have surpassed those of other countries.—A very amusing Italian author, who has attempted to prove that the modern world is not inferior to the ancient in virtues of every class, among his examples of the most singular modern chastity, has mentioned the English queen Ediltruda, whom he considers as *the wife of three husbands*, yet justly canonized *as a virgin* *. The extraordinary merit ascribed to this royal Old Maid of England, made me search minutely into the history of so interesting a personage. I find that the Ediltruda of this courteous Italian writer, is the lady celebrated by our venerable Bede under the name of *Ædiltrhyda*; a lady whose adventures I have mentioned in a preceding chapter, on a dif-

* See a curious book, intituled, *L'hoggidi overo gl' ingegni non inferiori a' passati*. Venetia, 1658, parte seconda, p. 437.

ferent occasion. I will here add, that our honest historian, who allows her *only two husbands*, yet vouches for her virginity in the following remarkable terms.—After saying that she resided twelve years with Ecgfrid the king, her last husband, and yet remained a perpetual virgin of glorious integrity, he thus proceeds:—"To me, and "to some others, who doubted if this "were really so, bishop Wilfrid, of blessed "memory, declared that he was himself a "perfect witness of her integrity; for Ecgfrid had promised to give him an ample "estate, and a large sum of money, if he "could persuade the queen to admit his "embraces; being assured that she loved no "man better. Nor should we doubt," continues the honest Bede, "that a circumstance could happen even in our time, "which faithful historians inform us was "very frequent in the preceding age*."

Frivolous

* Cujus consortio cum duodecim annis uteretur, perpetua tamen mansit virginитatis integritate gloriosa;

Frivolous and nonsensical as anecdotes of this kind may appear to a fastidious critic, they particularly deserve the attention of the truly philosophical, as they instruct us in that most interesting branch of useful knowledge, *the history of manners*. Although the opinions and practices of our age afford but little countenance to the fact so candidly supported by the venerable Bede, the most sceptical reader may incline to admit the truth of it, when he considers that, in the days of Ædilhryda, to lead the life of a nun was esteemed the height of human happiness, and the surest passport to celest-

riosa ; sicut mihi met sciscitanti, cum hoc an ita esset quibusdam venisset in dubium, beatæ memoriæ Wilfrid episcopus referebat, dicens se testem integritatis ejus esse certissimum : adeo ut Ecgfridus promiserit se ei terras ac pecunias multas esse donaturum, si reginæ posset persuadere ejus uti connubio ; quia sciebat illam nullum virorum plus illo diligere. Nec diffidendum est nostra etiam ætate fieri potuisse, quod ævo præcedente aliquoties factum fideles historiæ narrant. Hist. Eccles. p. 162. edit. Cantab. 1722.

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tial beatitude: nay, to become the parent of a nun was regarded as a blessing of such importance, that some good ladies were contented to sacrifice, for this blessing, the glory arising from that continent virtue, in which they prided themselves so devoutly. This remark is grounded on an anecdote as curious as the preceding, which Dugdale has inserted in his *Monasticon*, from the manuscript chronicles of John, the vicar of Tinmouth. This pious historian has recorded, that a nobleman, whom he calls Wolfhelmus, having children by his wife, resided with her for eighteen years in perfect continence; when an angel appeared, and exhorted this chaste couple to cohabit once more, for the sake of producing a spouse for Christ; and then to persevere in their former purity of life *. The sugges-

* Ex uxore sua liberos procreans, cum conjuge sua octodecim annis, usque ad provectam ætatem, cœlibem vitam duxit. Angelus autem Domini trina visione utrumque hortatus est ut convenirent, quia sponsam Christi generarent; et de cætero propositum servarent. *Monasticon Anglicanum*, tom. i. p. 256.

tion

tion of the angel was not disregarded ; and this heaven-directed intercourse gave birth to Wolfhildis, who became a nun of such signal purity, that she rejected the rich offers, and escaped from the amorous pursuit, of king Edgar ; although Wenfleda, the aunt of that licentious monarch, condescended to act as the base minister of his pleasures, and employed the most ungenerous artifice to ensnare this resolute and illustrious virgin.

But if there were times in which monastic chastity appeared so firm as to resist and triumph over the importunities even of royal intrigue, we must confess that, in other seasons, it assumed a very different appearance, and turned at last into the most deplorable frailty.

The venerable Bede has himself given us a very striking picture of monastic enormities, in his epistle to Ecgbert. From this we learn, that many young men, who had no title to the monastic profession, got possession of monasteries, where, instead of
I engaging

engaging in the defence of their country, as their age and rank required, they indulged themselves in the most dissolute indolence, and did not abstain from the virgins that were devoted to God*.

We learn from Dugdale, that in the reign of Henry the Second, the nuns of Amsbury abbey in Wiltshire were expelled from that religious house, on account of their incontinence†; and, to exhibit in the most lively colours the total corruption of monastic chastity, Bishop Burnet informs us, in his History of the Reformation, that when the nunneries were visited by the command of

* Ideoque vacantes, ac sine conjugio, exacto tempore pubertatis, nullo continentiae proposito perdurent; atque hanc ob rem vel patriam suam, pro qua militare debuerant, trans mare abeuntes relinquant, vel majore scelere atque impudentiâ, qui propositum castitatis non habent, luxuriæ ac fornicationi deserviant, neque ab ipsis sacratis Deo virginibus abstineant.

Epistola Venerabilis Bedæ

ad Ecgbertum Antistitem.

† Monasticon, vol. i. p. 191.

VOL. III.

G

Henry

Henry the Eighth, " whole houſes were
" found almoſt all with child*."

When we conſider to what oppreſſive indolence, to what a variety of wretchedneſs and guilt, the young and fair inhabitants of the cloiſter were frequently betrayed, we ought to admire thoſe benevolent authors, who, when the tide of religious prejudice ran very ſtrong in favour of monaſtic virginity, had ſpirit enough to oppoſe the torrent, and to caution the devout and tender ſex againſt ſo dangerous a profeſſion. It is in this point of view that the character of Eraſmus appears with the moſt amiable luſtre; and his name ought to be eternally dear to the female world in particular. Though his ſtudies and conſtitution led him almoſt to idolize thoſe eloquent fathers of the church, who have magnified monaſtic virginity, his good ſenſe, and his accurate ſurvey of human life,

* I quote the words of the Biſhop. See his Hiſtory of the Reformation, vol. i. p. 190.

enabled him to judge of the misery in which female youth was continually involved by a precipitate choice of the veil. He knew the successful arts by which the subtle and rapacious Monks inveigled young women of opulent families into the cloister, and he exerted his lively and delicate wit in opposition to so pernicious an evil. The writings of many eminent authors have been levelled against the abuses of the monastic life; but several of these, like the noted work of the humorous Rabelais, appear to have flowed from a spirit as wanton and licentious as ever lurked in a convent, and abound in language offensive to every decent reader. It is not thus with Erasmus; his two dialogues, intitled, *The Virgin averse to Marriage*, and *The Penitent Virgin*, are written with admirable pleasantry, and seem to have been dictated by a chaste and angelic desire to promote the felicity of woman.

In those nations of Europe where nunneries still exist, how many lovely victims

are continually sacrificed to the avarice or absurd ambition of inhuman parents! The misery of these victims has been painted with great force by some benevolent writers of France, and particularly by that admirable novelist Madame de Genlis, in her *Letters on Education*. In most of these pathetic histories, that are founded on the abuse of convents, the misery originates from the parent, and falls upon the child. The reverse has sometimes happened; and there are examples of unhappy parents, who have been rendered miserable by the religious perversity of a daughter. In the fourteenth volume of that very amusing book, the *Causes Célèbres*, a book which is said to have been the favourite reading of Voltaire, there is a striking history of a girl under age, who was tempted by pious artifice to settle herself in a convent, in express opposition to parental authority. Her parents, who had vainly tried the most tender persuasion, endeavoured at last to redeem their lost child by a legal process against
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the nunnery in which she was imprisoned. The pleadings on this remarkable trial may, perhaps, be justly reckoned among the finest pieces of eloquence that the lawyers of France have produced. Monsieur Gillet, the advocate for the parents, represented, in the boldest and most affecting language, the extreme baseness of this religious seduction. His eloquence appeared to have fixed the sentiments of the judges; but the cause of superstition was pleaded by an advocate of equal power, and it finally prevailed. The unfortunate parents of Marie Vernat, for this was the name of the deluded girl, were condemned to resign her for ever; and to make a considerable payment to those artful devotees, who had piously robbed them of their child.

When we reflect on the various evils that have arisen in convents, we have the strongest reason to rejoice and glory in that reformation, by which the nunneries of England were abolished. Yet it would

not be candid or just to consider all these as the mere harbours of licentiousness, since we are told that, at the time of their suppression, some of our religious houses were very honourably distinguished by the purity of their inhabitants. "The visitors," says bishop Burnet, "interceded earnestly for
"one nunnery in Oxfordshire, Godstow,
"where there was great strictness of life,
"and to which most of the young gentle-
"women of the country were sent to be
"bred; so that the gentry of the country
"desired the king would spare the house:
"yet all was ineffectual*."

In this point of view, much undoubtedly may be said in favour of convents; yet, when the arguments on both sides are fairly weighed, I apprehend that every true friend to female innocence will rejoice in those sensible regulations, which our Catholic neighbours have lately made respecting

* History of the Reformation, vol. i. p. 238.

nunneries,

nunneries, and which seem to promise their universal abolition*; an event which, we are told by experience, would be far from diminishing the purity of the female world, since I can safely assert, to the honour of the sisterhood, that at this day there are more *genuine Old Maids* existing in England, than could have been found here at any period of our history, when our island abounded in convents, when every county contained a multitude of nuns, and virginity was the most fashionable of all professions.

* See a judicious account of such regulations in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, in the Annual Register of 1775. History of Europe, p. 148.

C H A P. VII.

*On some Monastic Old Maids, distinguished by
literary Talents.*

WHEN we consider what innumerable multitudes of virgins have passed their lives in the leisure of a convent—when we reflect on the active ingenuity of the female mind, and remember that convents, during many ages, were the treasuries of all the learning that remained upon the earth—we may be surprised in observing the very small number of monastic Old Maids, who are said to have bequeathed to us any literary production. Perhaps, indeed, many a fair and chaste author has existed, whose name and works have been unjustly buried in sudden oblivion. I am led to this conjecture by finding that one monastic and maiden prodigy of literature has been strangely overlooked or misrepresented

sented by our best antiquarians; I mean the poetical Saxon nun Hrosvitha or Rosovida. This lady, who flourished about the year 980, exerted her poetical genius to confirm and increase the number of monastic Old Maids. She wrote six dramatic compositions in imitation of Terence; but on subjects very different from those of the Roman dramatist, as the plays of the virgin author were chiefly intended to animate her sister nuns to the preservation of their virginity.

It is strange that these dramatic curiosities are so imperfectly known among us, especially as some of our ablest scholars have lately employed themselves in elaborate researches on the obscure origin of the modern drama.

Mr. Warton, in the emendations which he has added to his second volume on English poetry, has, indeed, mentioned the name and title of this chaste and pious dramatist, but attributes her compositions to her first editor Conradus Celtes, who published

lished her plays and other sacred poems at Nurenburg, 1501.

Such inaccuracies are inevitable in a work so various and extensive as the excellent History of English Poetry; and I am confident that its learned and amiable author will thank me for pointing out this mistake, and thus enabling him to correct his involuntary injustice towards this literary phoenix of the cloister. Though her works were re-published at the beginning of this century, they are still so rare, that I have searched in vain through the libraries of our two universities, and through some of the most curious private collections of books in this kingdom, for a copy of her chaste and interesting dramas. I have for some time delayed to close this chapter of my Essay, in the hope of receiving Rosovida from a friend on the continent; but the rare dramatist not arriving as I expected, and these pages being called for by the press, I can only afford the curious reader the imperfect gratification of knowing

ing that these early plays, and an engraved portrait of the chaste maiden who wrote them, actually exist *.

I should particularly regret the loss of an opportunity to enrich this Essay with translations from this rare dramatic Old Maid, had I not the hope of doing ample justice to her merits on a future occasion. For, if the chaste sisterhood bestow on my labours in their service that animating favour which I am inclined to expect from their curiosity and good-nature, I mean to devote to them the residue of my advanced life, and to execute a work to their honour, which the republic of letters has long wanted, a Biographical Dictionary of eminent Old Maids.

Having this grand performance in contemplation, I shall not in these little books attempt to expatiate on the Teresas of

* The subjects of her six dramas are mentioned by Fabricius, Bib. Med. et infimæ Latinitatis. The most striking is the fifth, Paphnutius, on the conversion of Thais, a courtesan.

Spain,

Spain*, the Schurmans of Germany†, the Scuderys of France‡, the Bourignons of Flanders,

* Saint Terefa wrote her own pious memoirs, containing a full account of her various interviews with angels and the devil. The best edition of her works is in two quarto volumes, Madrid, 1752. She died 1582, and was canonised by Gregory XV. 1621.

† Anna Maria Schurman, eminent for her skill in languages, was a native of Cologne. She resided at Utrecht, and declined an offer of marriage from the famous Dutch poet, pensionary Cats. She died in Friesland, 1678. The most remarkable of her productions is a logical treatise, in Latin, to prove that the female mind is fit for learning and science.

‡ Magdeleine de Scudery, perhaps the plainest and most ingenious of Old Maids. Her romances, &c. amounted to forty-six volumes. She died in 1701, at the age of ninety-four. Her poetical compliment to the artist who drew her picture, shews us, in a lively point of view, both the homeliness of her features, and the sweetness of her character. The compliment may lose some of its elegance, but, I think, none of its good-nature, in the following translation :

Nanteuil !

Flanders*, or, in short, on any of those voluminous virgins, who have astonished the different

*Nanteuil! what wondrous magic grace
Must in your pencil lurk!
For in my glass I hate my face,
Yet love it in your work.*

* Antoinette Bourignon, born at Lisle 1616, was a visionary Old Maid. Though deformed from her birth, she surmounted many difficulties and hardships to preserve her chastity; and sustained an equal portion of literary labour, in the hope of illuminating the world by the publication of her pious reveries. They were printed in twenty-one volumes, octavo, with a life of the chaste author, written by one of her disciples. Bayle has given a very lively account both of the adventures and opinions of this wonderful lady; who seems to have entertained an idea as whimsical as that which Bayle has quoted on the occasion from the Count de Gabalis, “that a demon can, by a detestable artifice, make a virgin with child in her sleep, without prejudice to her virginity.” The Flemish Old Maid does not appear to have met with any mischance that could tempt her to adopt this idea, from a vain hope of repairing a ruined reputation. She was not only endued with the most perfect chastity herself, says her biographer,

but

different kingdoms of Europe by the fertility of their pious or romantic pens.

But there are two monastic Old Maids, so very remarkable, yet so little known in our country, that I must embrace the present opportunity of introducing them to the acquaintance of my fair readers. The first is a pious visionary virgin of Venice; the second, a poetical nun of Mexico. To the Venetian virgin, who is known in France by the name of Mere Jeanne, the famous French traveller, Guillaume Postel, was indebted for most of those singular ideas, by which he excited universal astonishment in the age of Francis the First. Postel was patronised for his extensive erudition by that munificent prince, to whom the learned enthusiast very confidently promised universal dominion. By this pro-

but had the faculty of communicating that virtue to others, a faculty which the philosophical Bayle has taken the liberty of treating with much spritely ridicule. This singular virgin died in Frieland, at the age of sixty-four.

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phecy in favour of France, Postel excited the enmity of some Spanish Jesuits in Rome, which obliged him to depart from that city, and repair to Venice. It was here that the wonderful *Mere Jeanne*, whom he describes as *a little old woman of fifty* *, imparted to him those mysteries, which he communicated to the world in a little book written in Italian, whose long title is so curious, that I shall insert an entire translation of it: "The First News of another World; that is, the admirable History (and not less necessary and useful to be read and understood by every one, than stupendous), intitled, The Venetian Virgin —part seen, part proved, and most faithfully written, by William Postel, first-born of the Regeneration, and Spiritual Father of the said Virgin."—1555. Octavo.—Of this very rare volume France is said to contain only two copies;

* Une petite vieille femmelette, de l'âge de cinquante ans.

but

but there is a French publication by the same author, containing the same doctrine; which consists in announcing to women an universal dominion over the world. This dominion, however, is purely spiritual, and means nothing more than the establishment of a more perfect reason, which beginning, according to the author, in his Venetian Virgin, was to extend over the universe, and thus confirm and perpetuate the sovereignty of woman. How far the doctrine of Postel may have been verified, and how far the sisterhood in particular may have enjoyed that sovereign purity and perfection of reason, which this learned man first discovered in his celebrated Venetian Old Maid, are delicate points, which the experience of my fair readers will best enable them to decide.

While they are settling the matter, let me hasten to Mexico, and present to them, from that city, sister Juana Inez de la Cruz, a religious virgin, so eminent for her poetical

tical talents, that she has been honoured with the title of a Tenth Muse.

Juana was born in November, 1651, at the distance of a few leagues from the city of Mexico. Her father was one of the many Spanish gentlemen, who sought to improve a scanty fortune by an establishment in America, where he married a lady of that country, descended from Spanish parents. Their daughter Juana was distinguished in her infancy by an uncommon passion for literature, and a wonderful facility in the composition of Spanish verses. Her parents sent her, when she was eight years old, to reside with her uncle in the city of Mexico. She had there the advantage of a learned education; and, as her extraordinary talents attracted universal regard, she was patronised by the lady of the viceroy, the Marquis de Mancera, and, at the age of seventeen, was received into his family. A Spanish encomiast of Juana relates a remarkable anecdote, which, he says, was

communicated to him by the viceroy himself. That nobleman, astonished by the extensive learning of the young Juana, invited forty of the most eminent literati that his country could afford, to try the extent and solidity of Juana's erudition. The young female scholar was freely but politely questioned, on the different branches of science, by theologians, philosophers, mathematicians, historians, and poets; "and, " as a royal galleon" (I use the words of his excellency the viceroy, says my Spanish author) " as a royal galleon would defend " herself against a few scallops, that might " attack her, so did Juana Inez extricate " herself from the various questions, arguments, and rejoinders, that each in his " own province proposed to her."

The applause which she received, on this signal display of her accomplishments, was far from inspiring the modest Juana with vanity or presumption. Indeed, a pious humility was her most striking characteristic.

ristic. Her life amounted only to forty-four years, and of these she passed twenty-seven, distinguished by the most exemplary exercise of all the religious virtues, in the convent of St. Geronimo. Her delight in books was extreme, and she is said to have possessed a library of four thousand volumes; but towards the close of her life, she made a striking sacrifice to charity, by selling her darling books for the relief of the poor. Few female authors have been more celebrated in life, or in death more lamented. The collection of her works, in three quarto volumes, contains a number of panegyrics, in verse and prose, bestowed on this chaste poetess by the most illustrious characters both of Old and New Spain. The most sensible of the Spanish critics, father Feyjoo, has made this general remark on Juana's compositions, "that they excel in ease and elegance, but are deficient in energy;" a failing the more remarkable, as the pious enthusiasm of this poetical nun was so

great, that she wrote in her own blood a profession of her faith. Let me observe, in answer to her critic, that most of Juana's verses are written on subjects, where poetical energy was not to be expected. Many of her poems are occasional compliments to her particular friends; and, in her sacred dramas, the absurd superstitions of her country were sufficient to annihilate all poetical sublimity.

In one of her short productions, she describes the injustice of men towards her own sex. I shall close my brief account of this admirable maiden with an imitation of this performance, taking the liberty, however, to omit several stanzas. It is, I think, the most pleasing specimen that I could select from her poetry, and has a particular claim to a place in this Essay, since it may be regarded as a vindication of Old Maids, composed by a virgin of eminence and authority.

Weak

* *Weak men! who without reason aim
To load poor woman with abuse,
Not seeing that yourselves produce
The very evils that you blame.*

*You 'gainst her firm resistance strive,
And, having struck her judgment mute,
Soon to her levity impute
What from your labour you derive.*

*Of woman's weakness much afraid,
Of your own prowess still you boast;
Like the vain child, who makes a ghost,
Then fears what he himself has made.*

*Her, whom your arms have once embrac'd,
You, think, presumptuously to find,
When she is woo'd, as Thais kind,
When wedded, as Lucretia chaste.*

* *Hombres necios, que acusais
A la muger sin raxon;
Sin ver, que fois la ocasion
De lo mismo, que culpais, &c.*

*How rare a fool must he appear,
Whose folly mounts to such a pass,
That first he breathes upon the glass,
Then grieves because it is not clear!*

*Still with unjust, ungrateful pride,
You meet both favour and disdain;
The firm, as cruel you arraign,
The tender, you as weak deride.*

*Your foolish humour none can please,
Since, judging all with equal phlegm,
One for her rigor you condemn,
And one you censure for her ease.*

*What wondrous gifts must her adorn,
Who would your lasting love engage,
When rigorous nymphs excite your rage,
And easy fair ones raise your scorn!*

*But while you shew your pride or power,
With tyrant passions vainly hot,
She's only blest who heeds you not,
And leaves you all in happy hour.*

C H A P.

C H A P V I I I .

On some Old Maids of the new World.

SEVERAL of the Spanish writers, in giving an early account of the western world, which they had just discovered, and were eager to make known, have described the wantonness and the servility of the American females in colours that are disgraceful to human nature. The relations of Peter Cieca de Leon, in particular, exhibit these indecent yet beautiful savages in the most deplorable point of view, and might almost lead us to imagine, that, rich as the new world appeared in many valuable productions, it never produced an Old Maid. Happily, however, for the honour of the sisterhood, there arose in that country a Spanish historian, who, being descended from a princess of Peru, engaged with patriotic ardour in the noble task of vindicat-

ing the purity of the Peruvian ladies. The Inca Garcilaso de la Vega opens the fourth book of his Royal Commentaries with a circumstantial account of the virgins devoted to the sun.—“In the false religion of Peru,” says the historian, “there were many things
 “truly great and respectable; one of these
 “was the profession of perpetual virginity,
 “which the women preserved in many houses
 “of retirement, built for them in many provinces of the empire: and, that it may be
 “understood what women these were, to
 “whom they were devoted, and in what
 “they were exercised, I shall describe them
 “minutely, because the Spanish historians,
 “who treat of this point, pass over it, according to the vulgar proverb, like *a cat*
 “*over coals*.”

This illustrious author then enters into every particular relating to these religious virgins, describing, from his own knowledge the exact situation of the building in

* Como Gato por brasas.

the

the city of Cusco, where they had formerly resided :—he contradicts the general opinion concerning them, and clearly proves, that they never dwelt or officiated as priestesses in the temple of the Sun; on the contrary, he asserts, that the Incas took particular care that no men should enter into the mansion of these sequestered maidens, and no woman into that of the Sun—two distinct buildings, at a considerable distance from each other, which Garcilaso tells us he had seen entire, as they were preserved with particular veneration by the Peruvians, in that memorable conflagration, when, revolting against their Spanish oppressors, they burnt the city of Cusco.

These virgins, although they did not reside in the Temple of the Sun, were still considered as the wives of that radiant power, whom they respected as the progenitor of their princes. They were all of royal blood—their number was not limited, “but commonly amounted,” says the historian, “to more than fifteen hundred.”

These

These ingenious maidens employed themselves in working assiduously for their nominal husband, the Sun; and, as he had no immediate occasion for the splendid vestments they fashioned for him, it was their custom to present his natural heir, the reigning Inca, with the rich and elegant productions of their manual labour. It is remarkable, that these sequestered virgins were liable to that inhuman punishment which was inflicted on the frail vestals of Rome; and, towards the person who seduced them from the vows of chastity, the Peruvian law was still more severe than the Roman; it not only took the life of the daring offender himself, but extended to all the unfortunate beings to whom he was related: all his possessions were to be laid desolate, that the earth might retain no traces of a wretch, who had impiously violated a hallowed spouse of the Sun.

But whether the maids of Peru were purer in constitution than the Roman vestals, or whether the Peruvian heroes had not,

not, like those of Rome, that audacity of character, which delights to plunge into the deepest guilt, we are assured that Cusco was not inured, like Rome, to the horrid spectacle of burying frail virgins alive.—“Such
 “ was the law,” says the historian of Peru,
 “ but the execution of it was never seen,
 “ because no person was ever found to have
 “ offended against it.”

The horror and indignation with which the Peruvians regarded those Spanish ruffians who profaned this virgin sanctuary, are happily expressed in those spirited verses of Dr. Warton, intitled, *The Dying Indian*.—The warrior thus exults at his death, in the idea of having avenged the injured maidens of his country.

O my son,
I feel the venom busy in my breast.—
Approach! and bring my crown, deck'd with
the teeth
Of that bold Christian, who first dar'd de-
flower
The Virgins of the Sun.—

I mark'd

I mark'd the spot where they interr'd this traitor,

*And once at midnight stole I to his tomb,
And tore his carcase from the earth, and left it
A prey to poisonous flies. Preserve this crown
With sacred secrecy*.*

The community of holy virgins had subsisted for some centuries in Peru, before that unfortunate empire became the victim of Spanish avarice, hypocrisy, and oppression: yet those historical sceptics, who delight to start a doubt on the existence of distant virtue, might intimate, with some plausibility, that this numerous community of nominal virgins never contained, perhaps, a single genuine Old Maid. They might say, that as the reigning Inca had the privilege of visiting these sequestered ladies (as he was the acknowledged representative of that radiant luminary to whom they all professed a connubial obedience) every virgin-

* Doddsley's Poems, vol. iv. p. 206.

wife of the Sun would be eager to consummate her marriage, by receiving the careffes of his imperial proxy.

But to invalidate fuch a fceptical objection againft the perpetual virginity of the Peruvian nuns, it may be fufficient to obferve, that, befides the fifteen hundred virgins who were confined in Cufco, there were many houfes of retirement in different provinces of the empire, where the moft lovely damfels were fequeftered, as the wives or concubines of the reigning Inca. And fuch was the religious veneration which the fair Peruvians entertained for their prince, that, if we may believe their hiftorian, every beautiful virgin confidered it as the height of felicity to be made a captive during life, for the mere chance of contributing to the pleasures of her royal mafter.

The courteous Garcilafco is fo follicitous to vindicate the chaftity of the fair Peruvians, that he informs us, there were other ladies, who did not live in a ftate of feclufion

sion from society, yet were bound by vows of perpetual virginity, which they most faithfully observed. He assures us, that he was personally acquainted with a most respectable old lady of this class, who was both a friend and a relation of the princess his mother. Whoever considers this honourable testimony in their favour, will readily, I trust, admit that primitive Old Maids existed in the western world, before it was enlightened by its European invaders.

I cannot quit this part of my subject without paying a just compliment to that immortal, though fictitious, maiden of Peru, the Zilia of Madame de Graffigny.—Whoever wishes to be more acquainted with the Virgins of the Sun, may find both information and delight in the Peruvian Letters; a work that, for delicacy of sentiment, and vivacity of description, is inferior, perhaps, to no performance which the literary world has received from the tender and lively imagination of woman.

C H A P.

C H A P. IX.

*On the Reverence paid to Old Maids by our
Northern Ancestors.*

O F all people on the globe, those to whom the sisterhood of Old Maids have been most indebted, are undoubtedly our brave progenitors of the North. The manly and generous Goths have acquired a degree of glory,

“ Above all Greek, above all Roman fame,”

by paying the most tender deference to the fair sex, and by setting the highest value on the virtue of chastity. According to the religious creed of these gallant tribes, the virgin who died chaste, like the warrior who fell in battle, was immediately admitted, with distinguished honour, into their

2

Valhalla,

Valhalla, or Palace of the Dead*. Among the Goddeffes enumerated in that amufing collection of Gothic Fables, the Edda, we find the two virgins Fylla and Gefione. The office of the latter was to prefide over maidens after their death. The Hall of Odin, and the Paradife of Mahomet, bear a ftriking refemblance to each other. The beatitude which departed warriors were fupposed to enjoy in thefe two regions of eternal delight, appears to have confifted chiefly in being attended by virgins; and the learned Keyfler fupposes, that Mahomet was indebted to the ancient Scythians for this alluring idea †.

* In ejus (Freiæ) aulam etiam veniebant e fequiore sexu, quæ virgines obiiſſent.

Keyfler, Antiq. Septent. pag. 180.

† Mahomed enim nihil novi hac parte effinxit et pollicitus eſt aſſeclis; ſed quod in vicinis gentibus, Scytharum progenie, et Turcis imprimis fortè videbat ſuis arridere, id in novam, quam adornabat, religionem tranſtulit.

Ibid. pag. 152.

The

The Gothic maid, who persevered in her chastity, had indeed a peculiar claim to distinction in the regions of the dead, since, according to the popular creed of her country, she was exposed, when living, to trials of the most extraordinary and tremendous nature, arising from the influence of Runic spells. In the singular little poem, in which Odin enumerates his own magical powers, he declares, that “ he is possessed of an incantation, by which he can change the mind of any coy maiden, and bend her entirely to his wishes *.”—“ And long after the age of Odin,” says Bartholine, “ it was believed, that, by a certain Runic composition, the mind of any damsel, however averse to love, might be rendered pliant to the entreaties of her admirer—but if the lover, who attempted to form this amorous spell, made any mistake, even in tracing a single letter of the charm, instead of inspiring his fair one with love,

* Bartholin. Antiq. Dan. p. 658.

“ he deprived her of health, and loaded her
“ with such bodily infirmities, as could be
“ cured only by a more skilful master of
“ this interesting magic, who might disco-
“ ver the errors of the imperfect spell, and
“ remove the evil it produced by a new in-
“ cantation.”

To confirm his account of this popular opinion, my author has quoted a little story, which shews what a severe misfortune it was to a Gothic lady to be beloved by a blockhead.

The sum of the story is this:—Helga, the daughter of Thorfin, was reduced to great infirmity, both of body and mind, by one of those amorous Runic spells, imperfectly written by a bold but ignorant rustic, who had first vainly sought her in marriage, and afterwards as vainly courted her to an illicit connection. The source of the lady's malady was detected, and she was restored to health by the superior magical talents of Egill the poet.

If the heroes of the North, endued as
they

they were with great bodily strength, possessed also this magic influence over the minds of the fair sex, they certainly deserve our esteem for having used their double powers with admirable moderation and generosity. The Goths, in particular, were not only attentive to female honour, in respect to the women of their own nation; but they paid the highest regard to the chastity of their fair captives, in the most licentious hours of victory and plunder. When the Gothic king Totila made himself master of Rome, he exerted so much care in preserving the women from violation, that, according to the historian Procopius, “not a single virgin, or matron, or widow, was dishonoured*.”

Before that event, an Italian, named Calaber, had complained to the Gothic monarch, that his daughter had been ravished

* Ita ut non virginis, non matrisfamilias, non viduæ ullius corpori illudum sit: unde magna illi modestiæ fama.—Procopii, lib. iii.—Grotii Hist. Goth. p. 356.

by a powerful chieftain of his army. The magnanimous sovereign doomed the offender to death, although the Gothic nobles interceded for him, on account of his military talents: Totila replied to their intercession in a speech truly royal:—the nobles acquiesced in the justice of their king: the distinguished ravisher suffered death for his offence, and his property was given to the maiden whom he had injured*.

A tender veneration for the fair sex was a characteristic of the northern barbarians, to which Cæsar and Tacitus have borne a more early and a very honourable testimony. The latter has preserved the names of two Northern Old Maids, who appear to have been idolized by their gallant countrymen for their prophetic sagacity. The most eminent of these was Velleda, a virgin who

* *Peruasi dictis Gothi pro satellitè haud ultra deprecabantur; sed regem finebant de eo quod vellet agere. Is haud multò post homini vitam ademit. Pecunias, quæcunque ejus fuerant, stuprum passæ dedit.*

Grotii Hist. Goth. p. 324.

had extensive authority over that warlike tribe the Bructeri, according to the custom of the Germans, says Tacitus, which led them to worship their prophetic females as goddesses. Velleda maintained her dignity with all the circumspection that is proper for a maiden of a character so important. She resided in a lofty tower, and admitted not to her presence the Roman emissaries who wished to converse with her *: yet, sharing the misfortunes of her brave countrymen, this chaste prophetess fell a victim to Roman tyranny, and is supposed to have been a captive in Rome during the reign of Vespasian. She had, however, a virgin successor in her religious office, whose name was Ganna; and from this circumstance Mr. Pellontier, in his elaborate history of the Celts, has supposed, with great probability, that in the German

* Sed coram adire, alloquique Velledam, negatum. Arcebantur aspectu, quo venerationis plus inesset.

Tacitus, Hist. lib. iv.

tribe of the Bructeri there was a regular succession of prophetic Old Maids*.

The active valour, and the enthusiastic gallantry, which the manly barbarians of the North discovered even in their rudest state, produced, in process of time, that singular and gorgeous monument of Gothic genius, the institution of Chivalry; an institution superior, in some points of view, to every thing that we find in the antiquities of Greece and Rome; an institution peculiarly interesting to the sisterhood of Old Maids, as one of its capital objects was the preservation of virginity!

A literary prelate of our church has attempted, in a series of letters, to elucidate this noble institution, and to vindicate the glory of the Gothic character:—but he has unluckily made two remarks, which would greatly debase the very character that he wishes to exalt, if they were not, like many of his critical opinions, entirely devoid of all so-

* *Histoire des Celtes*, liv. iv. chap. 18.

lid foundation. As these two remarks relate to virgins, and their chaste Gothic admirers and defenders, I shall dwell a little on both. The learned bishop asserts, that the Grecian hero, or demi-god, and the Gothic knight, were characters completely similar; or, to use his own words, that “the Grecian Bacchus and Hercules were *the exact counter-*”
 “*parts* of Sir Launcelot and Amadis de
 “Gaule*.” He quotes, indeed, the great authority of Spenser for this comparison; but a slight resemblance in valour and conquest was sufficient for the purpose of the poet. The critic, attempting to aggrandize the Gothic name, ought, instead of adopting this poetical similitude, to have shewn how the Grecian differed from the more noble and more virtuous Goth. In the great point of generous chastity, the difference was extreme. In the Greek poem that records the adventures of Bacchus, one of his principal exploits is that of violating a

* Hurd’s Letters on Chivalry, Letter iv.

sleeping nymph *; and the incontinence of Hercules was so notorious, that (not to mention his robbing an Amazonian princess of her girdle) he is said by Herodotus to have cohabited with a female monster in Scythia †. If the Gothic heroes, Sir Launcelot and Amadis, could start into life, what punishment would they think severe enough for a critic, who had rashly dared to call them *the exact counterparts* of these Grecian ravishers. In fact, no comparison can be more injurious; for, in the heroic ages, the Grecian hero appears to have taken the most unwarrantable liberties with every virgin that fell into his power; and the Gothic knight, on the contrary, not only defended the purity of every maid in distress, but was often bound by the most solemn oaths to remain a virgin himself.—The second remark of the learned bishop is equally injurious to the pure and liberal heroes of the Gothic or feudal ages: for it supposes “that *feudal*

* Nonni Dionys. lib. xlviii.

† Herodot. lib. iv.

“ *gallantry*

“ *gallantry* was the offspring of the privilege,
 “ which the ladies then possessed, of feudal
 “ succession*,” or, in other words, that the
 Gothic knights idolized the fair for their rank
 and riches, and not for their beauty and their
 virtue. We can believe, indeed, that such
 ideas might influence the courtly manners
 of a priest in the eighteenth century; but a
 very slight acquaintance with history and
 romance is sufficient to convince us, that
 such ideas were never harboured by any
 true knight, in the purest ages of chivalry.

How far the virtue of the ladies was
 more respected than their rank, by the gal-
 lant gentry of this period, we have a strik-
 ing example in an anecdote related by that
 indefatigable searcher into the records of
 chivalry, Mr. de Sainte Palaye.

This curious author informs us, “ that
 “ the Chevalier de la Tour, in his instruc-
 “ tions addressed to his daughters, about
 “ the year 1371, mentions a knight of his
 “ time, who, in passing near the castles in-

* Letters on Chivalry.

“ habited

“ habited by ladies, affixed a mark of in-
“ famy to the mansion of those, who were
“ not worthy to receive loyal knights pur-
“ suing honour and virtue. He bestowed,
“ at the same time, a just encomium on
“ those whose merits entitled them to pub-
“ lic esteem*.”

That insinuating Platonic love, which mingled itself with the manners of chivalry, has often, perhaps, undermined the chastity of a resolute virgin. It would be a curious speculation to consider how far this refined passion has proved a treacherous destroyer of Old Maids, and to trace its prevalence or decline in different ages; but, as I fear it might lead me to swell this little work into a formidable size, I shall content myself with pointing out the subject as worthy the researches of my philosophical brethren; and only remark, that this chaste yet dangerous affection was highly fashionable at the court of England in the year 1634, as

* *Memoires sur l'Ancienne Chevalerie*, tom. i.
p. 86.

we learn from one of Howell's familiar letters*; and that it is ridiculed with much lively spirit in a play of Sir William Davenant's, called the Platonic Lovers, represented in 1636.

Let us return to the ages of chivalry.—Notwithstanding the prevalence of this perilous Platonic love in those ages, the spirit of the times gave such fidelity, as well as vigour, to all the generous affections, that I am persuaded many a lovely damsel of that period became a perfect Old Maid, from a faithful attachment to the memory of her gallant deceased admirer. I consider the tender Melesinda, Countess of Tripoli, in Palestine, as a most respectable Old Maid of this class. The romantic Troubadour Geoffrey Rudel became enamoured of her beauty by the mere report of her charms. He crossed the sea to throw himself at her feet. Illness seized him on the voyage, and when they carried him ashore, he was supposed to be dead. The singular passion of the

* Vol. i. page 259.

knight touched the tender soul of the Countess. She hastened to visit this gallant victim of love. He still breathed—received her compassionate embraces, and expired with expressions of delight on the felicity of dying in her arms. The Countess honoured his remains with a magnificent funeral, and retired to lament him, during her life, in the chaste solitude of the cloister*.

Strange as it may sound, the virginity of woman will be often found to have derived its firmest support from the gallantry of man; a paradox sufficiently explained by the preceding story.

As the Greeks were utterly unacquainted with the spirit of gallantry, according to the confession of their learned historian Mr. Mitford†, this may be one among other reasons to account for the extreme scarcity of elderly virgins in Greece. For our superior politeness, and that happy mix-

* *Histoire des Troubadours*, tom. i. p. 89.

† *History of Greece*, p. 122.

ture of frankness and delicacy in our manners towards women, by which the modern world is exalted above the ancient, we are certainly indebted to our noble ancestors of the North, who exhibited, in the earliest period of their history, the most generous attention to female honour in general, and a particular veneration for their intelligent Old Maids.

END OF THE FIFTH PART.

PART

P A R T VI.

CONTAINING MISCELLANEOUS MATTER.

C H A P. I.

On certain Passages in English Poets concerning Virginity.—On the medical Influence ascribed to it.—On various Devices supposed to ascertain it, &c.

HAVING examined at large, in a former part of this Essay, the many brilliant compliments which the fathers of the church have paid to virginity, I shall now consider the terms in which the greatest poets of our country have spoken of this delicate and interesting subject. As enthusiasm is the essential quality both of saints and poets, we might from hence conjecture, that the genuine Old Maid would
be

be treated with equal reverence by both; but alas! the poetical enthusiast is subject to a certain gay and wanton levity of spirit, which tempts him now and then to fail in the respect that we all owe to the sisterhood. This remark is particularly applicable to Chaucer and Shakespeare. I am happy, however, in being able to add, for the honour of the English muse, that two poets, of equal eminence, have treated virginity with all the modest and tender veneration which we have seen it receiving from so many eloquent saints. It will, I trust, be amusing to compare the language of these four illustrious bards on our favourite subject. — Let us begin with Chaucer. Though he flourished at a time when the convent and chivalry, those two profest guardians of maiden purity, were in fashion, he does not seem to have entertained any very high reverence for a perpetual virgin; at least we find him treating that character with much sarcastic jocularity, in the long
and

and lively prologue with which his Wife of Bath introduces her tale. The following lines seem to indicate that the poet himself possessed a spirit as amorous as that of the buxom lady, in whose character he is speaking.

*What rekketh me, though folk say vilanie
Of shrewed Lamech, and his bigamie ;
I wot wel Abraham was an holy man,
And Jacob eke, as fer as ever I can,
And eche of hem had wives mo than two,
And many another holy man also.
Wher can ye seen, in any maner age,
That highe God defended mariage
By expresse word ? I pray you telleth me,
Or wher commanded be virginitee ?*

*I wot, as wel as ye, it is no drede,
The Apostle, whan he spake of maidenbede,
He said, that precept therof had he non ;
Men may conseille a woman to ben on,
But conseilling is no commandement ;
He put it in our owen jugement.*

*For hadde God commanded Maidenbede,
Than had he dampned Wedding out of drede;
And certes, if ther were no fede yfowe,
Virginitee than wherof shuld it growe?*

Tyrwhitt's Chaucer, vol. i. p. 224.

It is remarkable, that the argument against virginity, contained in the last couplet, appears also in a Greek epigram by Paulus Silentiarius, an author of the sixth century, who has described the church of Sancta Sophia at Constantinople in a very singular poem, and who says, in the epigram to which I allude,

*Virginity is wealth: but if by all
This wealth were hoarded, life itself must
fall*.*

Let me observe, for the credit of Chaucer,

* Καλα τα παρθενικη χειμηλια. παρθενικη δε,
Τον βιον ωλεσεν αν, πασι φυλαττομενη.

Anthologia Lubini, 4to. page 43.

that he appears desirous of atoning for the freedom with which he had treated virgins of every class, by his verses on that marvellous holy maid St. Cæcilia; a composition in which he engaged, if we may believe the following introduction to it, to preserve himself from the perils of licentious indolence:

*And for to put us from swiche idelnesse,
That cause is of so gret confusion,
I have here don my feithful besinesse,
After the Legende, in translation
Right of thy glorious lif and passion,
Thou, with thy gerlond wrought of rose and
lilie,
Thee mene I, maid and martir, Seinte Cecilie.*
Tyrwhitt's Chaucer, vol. iii. p. 65.

But if Chaucer appears to have failed now and then, in his veneration towards the sisterhood, his transgressions against the chaste community are very trivial, when compared with those of Shakespeare. The

Old Maid may applaud herself for possessing a charitable spirit, if she perfectly forgives this faucy prince of dramatic poets for the following passage in his comedy of "All's well that Ends Well."

" It is not politic in the commonwealth
" of nature to preserve virginity. Loss
" of virginity is rational increase; and
" there was never a virgin got, till virginity
" was first lost. That you were made of,
" is metal to make virgins. Virginity, by
" being once lost, may be ten times found;
" by being ever kept, is ever lost: 'tis too
" cold a companion; away with it! There's
" little can be said in't, 'tis against the rule
" of nature. To speak on the part of vir-
" ginity, is to accuse your mothers; which
" is most infallible disobedience. He that
" hangs himself is a virgin; virginity mur-
" ders itself; and should be buried in high-
" ways, out of all sanctified limit, as a des-
" perate offendress against nature. Virgi-
" nity breeds mites, much like a cheese;
" consumes itself to the very paring, and so
" dies.

“ dies with feeding its own stomach. Be-
 “ sides, virginity is peevish, proud, idle,
 “ made of self-love, which is the most in-
 “ hibited sin in the canon. Keep it not,
 “ you cannot chuse but lose by’t: out
 “ with’t! Within ten years it will make it-
 “ self two, which is a goodly increase, and
 “ the principal itself not much the worse—
 “ away with’t!—’Tis a commodity will lose
 “ the gloss with lying; the longer kept, the
 “ less worth:—off with’t while ’tis vendible!
 “ answer the time of request. Virginity,
 “ like an old courtier, wears her cap out of
 “ fashion; richly suited, but unsuitable:
 “ just like the brooch and the toothpick,
 “ which wear not now. Your date is better
 “ in your pye and your porridge than in
 “ your cheek: and your virginity, your
 “ old virginity, is like one of our French
 “ withered pears: it looks ill: it eats
 “ dryly:—marry, ’tis a wither’d pear: it
 “ was formerly better: marry, yet ’tis a
 “ wither’d pear*.”

* All’s Well that Ends Well, Act I. Scene 1.

Let us observe, as an apology for our inimitable poet, that he has given us the preceding farcafms againft the fifterhood as the language of a poltroon.

Since the perfonal hiftory of Shakefpeare, dark as it is, muft be ftill peculiarly interefting to every Englifh reader, let me hazard a few conjectures concerning it, that were fuggested by the paffage I have quoted.

Mr. Malone, in his very ingenious and amufing attempt to afcertain the order in which the plays of Shakefpeare were written, has allotted the comedy of "All's Well that Ends Well" to the year 1598. I was at firft inclined to fuppose, that this elegant and accurate commentator was miftaken in this article, from an idea, that Shakefpeare could not have written fuch an inveftive againft old virginity in the reign of Elizabeth, who prided herfelf on being the queen of Old Maids. But, reflection has led me into a conjecture, which, fanciful as it may feem to others, to me appears

pears to confirm the date assigned by Mr.
 Malone to this comedy; and to give also
 additional spirit to the passage, as directly
 pointed against the queen herself, from an
 honest indignation of the poet in behalf of
 his great friend and patron the liberal earl
 of Southampton. Mr. Malone, in speaking
 of this nobleman, has observed, "that he
 " attended lord Essex on the expedition to
 " Cadiz, in 1597, as a volunteer, and after-
 " wards to Ireland as general of the horse,
 " from which employment he was dismissed
 " by the peremptory orders of Queen Eli-
 " zabeth, who was offended with him for
 " having presumed to marry Miss Eliza-
 " beth Vernon [in 1596] without her ma-
 " jesty's consent."

Now it appears to me highly probable,
 that when his patron was thus injuriously
 treated by the antiquated maiden queen,
 merely for marrying a lovely young woman,
 it appears, I say, highly probable, that
 Shakespeare might at this juncture point all
 his wit, with a generous acrimony, against

that old virginity, which, equivocal as it was, his tyrannical sovereign considered as the highest of her titles. In the following year (1599) when Essex was in confinement, Lord Southampton and Lord Rutland (as we learn from a letter of that period) “came not to the court [at Non-such] but passed their tyme in London, “*merely in going to plaies every day* *.” If the comedy in question made a part of their entertainment, as it probably did, they must have enjoyed, with peculiar relish, this spirited caricatura of old virginity, as highly applicable to that malevolent, affected Old Virgin, who had so recently excited their anger and derision.

This conjecture may at first appear inconsistent with the tradition, that Shakespeare wrote *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in the year 1601, at the request of Elizabeth; yet it is possible, that her majesty might enjoin our poet to exhibit a carica-

* Rowland Whyte's Letter to Sir Robert Sidney.

tura of love, in the person of Falstaff, to atone for the satirical freedom with which he had delineated old virginity in the speech of Parolles. We must at the same time confess, that this imperious Old Maid would have probably corrected the dramatist in a manner much more severe, had she ever suspected him of pointing his satire against her own princely person; although she owed him much indulgence for the sublime compliment which he had formerly paid her.

“ *As a fair Vestal throned by the West* *.”

But it is time to quit our uncertain conjectures on this inimitable sovereign of the drama, to speak with more certainty of a poet, who has treated the sisterhood with superior courtesy. I mean the gentle Spenser; who has not only celebrated the virginity of his queen, in the Introduction to his *Legend of Chastitie* †, but in his cha-

* See Midsummer-Night's Dream.

† See the third Book of the Faerie Queene.

acter of Belphebe has given us the following beautiful description of this female perfection.

*That daintie rose, the daughter of her morne,
More deare than life she tendered, whose
flowre
The girland of her honour did adorne ;
Ne suffred she the middaye's scorching
powre,
Ne the sharp northerne wind thereon to
showre ;
But lapped up her silken leaves most chaire,
When so the froward skye began to lowre :
But soone as calmed was the christall aire,
She did it faire dispred, and let to flourish faire.
Eternall God, in his almighty powre,
To make ensample of his heavenly grace,
In Paradise whilome did plant this flowre ;
Whence he it fetcht out of her native place,
And did in stocke of earthly flesh enrace,
That mortall men her glory should admire :
In gentle ladies breste, and bounteous race
Of womankind, it fairest flowre doth spire,
And beareth fruit of honour and all chaste desire.
Fayre*

*Fayre ympes of beautie, whose bright skin-
ing beames*

*Adorne the world with like to heavenly light,
And to your willes both royalties and
reames*

*Subdew, through conquest of your wondrous
might !*

*With this faire flowre your goodly girlonds
dight,*

*Of chastitie and vertue virginall,
That shall embellish more your beautie bright,
And crowne your heades with heavenly co-
ronall,*

*Such as the angels weare before Gods tri-
bunall.*

*To your faire selves a faire ensample frame
Of this faire virgin, this Belphæbe faire,
To whom, in perfect love and spotlesse fame
Of chastitie, none living may compaire :
Ne poysnous envy justly can empaire
The prayse of her fresh flowring mayden-
head ;*

*For-thy she standeth on the highest staire
Of*

*Of th' honourable stage of womanhead,
That ladies all may follow her ensample dead*.*

To these lines of Spenser I am tempted to add another portrait of virginity, by his neglected but spirited disciple Phineas Fletcher, who was once called the Spenser of his age. In his allegorical poem, intitled "The Purple Island," after giving a description of Agnia, or *Chastitie in the Married*, to use the words of his own illustration, he proceeds thus :

*With her, her sister went, a warlike maid,
† Parthenia, all in steel and gilded arms ;
In needle's stead a mighty spear she sway'd,
With which in bloody fields, and fierce
alarms,
The boldest champion she down would bear,
And like a thunderbolt wide passage tear,
Flinging all to the earth with her enchanted
spear.*

* Faerie Queene, book iii. canto v.

† Chastitie in the Single.

*Her goodly armour seem'd a garden green,
 Where thousand spotlesse lilies freshly blew;
 And on her shield the 'lone bird might be seen,
 Tb' Arabian bird, shining in colours new;
 Itself unto itself was onely mate,
 Ever the same, but new in newer date,
 And underneath was writ, Such is chaste
 single state *.*

After a long description of this heroine,
 the poet concludes her character in the fol-
 lowing stanza :

*A thousand knights woo'd her with busie
 pain;
 To thousand she her virgin grant denied;
 Although, her dear-sought love to entertain,
 They all their wit, and all their strength
 applied:
 Yet in her heart Love close his scepter sway'd,
 That to an heavenly spouse her thoughts
 betraid,
 Where she a maiden wife might live, and
 wifely maid.*

* The Purple Island, Canto x. edit. 1633, p. 141.
 But

But of all the poetical compliments that virginity has received, none, I think, are so truly beautiful and sublime, as those which have proceeded from the chaste enthusiasm of Milton. Let the reader judge from the following passages of Comus.—The elder brother, in speaking of his lost sister, says,

She has a hidden strength,

— — — — —
Which if Heaven gave, it may be term'd her own :

'Tis Chastity, my brother, Chastity :

*She that has that is clad in complete steel,
 And, like a quiver'd nymph with arrows keen,
 May trace huge forests and unharbour'd beats,
 Infamous hills, and sandy perilous wilds,
 Where, through the sacred rays of Chastity,
 No savage fierce, bandite, or mountaneer,
 Will dare to soil her virgin purity :
 Yea there, where very desolation dwells,
 By grots, and caverns shagg'd with horrid
 shades,*

She

*She may pass on, with unblench'd majesty,
Be it not done in pride or in presumption.—
Some say, no evil thing that walks by night
In fog, or fire, by lake, or moorish fen,
Blue meager hag, or stubborn unlaid ghost,
That breaks his magic chains at curfew time;
No goblin, or swart faery of the mine,
Hath hurtful pow'r o'er true virginity.—
Do ye believe me yet, or shall I call
Antiquity from the old schools of Greece
To testify the arms of Chastity?
Hence had the huntress Dian her dread bow,
Fair silver-shafted queen, for ever chaste,
Wherewith she tam'd the brinded lions
And spotted mountain pard, but set at nought
The frivolous bolt of Cupid; Gods and men
Fear'd her stern frown, and she was queen o'
th' woods.
What was that snaky-headed Gorgon shield
That wise Minerva wore, unconquer'd virgin,
Wherewith she freez'd her foes to congeal'd
stone,
But rigid looks of chaste austerity,
And noble grace, that dash'd brute violence
With*

*With sudden adoration and blank awe?
 So dear to Heaven is faintly Chastity,
 That when a soul is found sincerely so,
 A thousand liveried angels lacky her,
 Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt,
 And in clear dream and solemn vision
 Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear,
 Till oft converse with heavenly habitants
 Begin to cast a beam on th' outward shape,
 The unpolluted temple of the mind,
 And turns it by degrees to the soul's essence,
 Till all be made immortal*.*

Again, the lady herself, in her address to
 Comus, vindicates, with great spirit, the
 dignity and power of maiden excellence.

*To him that dares
 Arm his profane tongue with contemptuous
 words
 Against the sun-clad power of Chastity,
 Fain would I something say; yet to what end?
 Thou hast nor ear nor soul to apprehend*

* Comus, ver. 415.

*The sublime notion and high mystery,
That must be uttered to unfold the sage
And serious doctrine of Virginity.*

While we admire the transcendant grace and energy of Milton's language, let us remark, in justice to an elder and admirable poet of our country, that most of the preceding ideas, which relate to the prerogatives of the genuine and confirmed virgin, are copied from that neglected but very beautiful pastoral drama, the Faithful Shepherdess of Fletcher. In this drama, Clorin, a tender and pious nymph, having buried her lover, and being determined to die an Old Maid, resides by his grave in a wood, and is attended by a modest and obedient satyr. The cause of this obedience, from such a creature, she expresses in the following speech; to which Milton has paid the highest honour, by more than one imitation of it.

*What greatness, or what private hidden power
Is there in me, to draw submission*

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L

From

*From this rude man and beast?—Sure I was
mortal,*

*The daughter of a shepherd; he was mortal;
And she that bore me mortal: Prick my hand,
And it will bleed; a fever shakes me, and
The self-same wind that makes the young lambs
shrink*

*Makes me a-cold; my fear says I am mortal:
Yet I have heard (my mother told it me)
And now I do believe it, if I keep
My virgin flower uncropt, pure, chaste, and
fair,*

*No goblin, wood-god, fairy, elf, or fiend,
Satyr, or other power that haunts the groves,
Shall hurt my body, or by vain illusion
Draw me to wander after idle fires,
Or voices calling me in dead of night,
To make me follow, and so tole me on,
Through mire and standing pools, to find my
ruin;*

*Else, why should this rough thing, who never
knew*

*Manners, nor smooth humanity, whose heats
Are rougher than himself, and more misshapen,
Thus*

*Thus mildly kneel to me ? Sure there's a power
In that great name of virgin, that binds fast
All rude uncivil bloods, all appetites
That break their confines : then, strong Chastity,
Be thou my strongest guard, for here I'll dwell,
In opposition against Fate and Hell*.*

We find in the same drama, that the poet has ingeniously availed himself of the popular opinion concerning the medical power of the true maiden. His holy shepherdes, Clorin, says, in describing herself,

*Of all green wounds I know the remedies,
In men or cattle, be they stung with snakes,
Or charm'd with powerful words of wicked art,
Or be they love-sick, or through too much heat
Grown wild or lunatic, their eyes or ears
Thicken'd with misty film of dulling rheum ;
These I can cure, such secret virtues lie
In herbs, applied by a virgin's hand †.*

The salutary influence ascribed to virginity appears to have been very extensive.

* The Faithful Shepherdes, act i. sc. 1. † Ibid.

In the old poem on Sir Bevis of Southampton, we find that noble knight preserved from his enemy, the dragon, by luckily stumbling into a well of miraculous purity:

*For some time dwelled in that land
A virgin full of Christes sand,
That had been bathed in that well,
That ever after, as men can tell,
Might no venomous worme come therein,
By the virtue of that virgin *.*

But the idea that medical powers belong to the true maiden, though it was cherished by our romances of chivalry, and still more by our monastic legends, did not first arise from modern superstition. We learn from a passage in Ælian, that some of the ancients admitted even the apparel of a genuine maid among the articles of their materia medica; nor did they suppose the efficacy of this singular medicine confined to the human frame: "a horse," says the au-

* Warton's Essay on Spenser, page 50. vol. i.

thor I have just mentioned, "may be cured
 " of the strangury, if a virgin will unloose
 " her zone, and apply it to his head."

That dreadful disease of man, which has been supposed, both in England and France, to admit of no cure, but from the touch of the sovereign, might be healed, according to the opinion of the ancients, by the purer hand of virginity. But as these maidenly remedies have long ceased to be fashionable in the medical world, I shall not swell these volumes by enumerating the different maladies to which they were applied, or the various modes of application.

Ceasing, therefore, to consider virginity as a nostrum, let us proceed to remark, that it has sometimes been the patient, as well as the instrument, of quacks. It is one of the most striking foibles in man, that he will often attempt to ascertain, by insufficient tests, many doubtful points, which it would be much wiser to admit entirely upon trust. Hence have arisen many fanciful and fallacious devices to prove the in-

tegrity of a virgin. Pliny the naturalist informs us, that the stone Gagates of Lycia was used for this curious experiment; and Albertus Magnus is still more explicit in speaking of its wonderful property*. A similar power of proving the fidelity of a wife is ascribed to the magnet, in the pleasing little Greek poem on precious stones, which bears the name of Orpheus†.

But the most surprising evidence, that ever bore testimony against a frail woman, was a bird called Porphyrio, which is said to have had so delicate a sense of honour, that it put an end to its own existence, if its mistress offended against the laws of chastity‡.

On this subject we ought not to omit the

* De Miner. lib. ii. De Gagate—aiunt autem de expertis esse, quod si colatura, et ejus lotura cum rasura detur virgini, bibita retinebit eam, quod non minget; si autem non est virgo, statim minget: et sic debet probari an aliqua sit virgo.

† Ver. 319, p. 44, edit. Tyrwhitt.

‡ Athenæus, lib. ix.—Ælian, lib. iii. cap. 42.

serpent

serpent kept in a temple of Juno, which disdained to accept any food unless offered by the pure hand of a virgin. This dainty animal is mentioned by Ælian, and alluded to by the poet Propertius, who tells us, in elegant and picturesque verses, of which the following are an imperfect copy,

*In pale suspense the fearful damsels gaz'd,
Who to the serpent's mouth rash offerings rais'd;
From the chaste maid the proffer'd food he
takes,
While in her trembling hand the basket shakes*.*

In the Greek romances we find various trials of virginity circumstantially described. Chariclia, the heroine of Heliodorus, is represented by that elegant and lively writer as passing with intrepid innocence through a fiery ordeal. The lovely maiden, arrayed

* *Talia demissæ pallent ad sacra puellæ,*

Cum temerè anguineo creditur ore manus :

Ille sibi admotas a virgine corripit escas ;

Virginis in palmis ipsa canistra tremunt.

Propertius, lib. iv. eleg. 8.

in a Delphic robe, with her hair dishevelled, and with a countenance expressing religious transport, leaps on a blazing altar, and stands unhurt amid the flames, attracting universal admiration, as more like a Divinity than a mortal *.

Achilles Tattius has delineated a scene of a similar kind, still more picturesque. He tells us, that in a grove belonging to Diana there was a cave of peculiar sanctity devoted to Pan. Just within the portal of this cave, a miraculous pipe was suspended, formed of those reeds into which the nymph Syrinx was metamorphosed, when she fled from the wanton pursuit of the rustic God.

A wondrous power resided in this pipe, and rendered it an unquestionable test of maiden innocence. Whenever a true virgin entered the cave, sounds of the sweetest melody proceeded from this instrument; but if one who had lost her purity was rash enough to approach it, the pipe continued

* Heliodori *Æthiop.* lib. x.

silent,

silent, and, instead of music, a groan of lamentation was sent forth from the cave.

Leucippe, the heroine of Tattus, being accused of impurity, is brought to ascertain either her guilt or innocence by this awful experiment. She is surrounded by solicitous spectators: her malignant accuser, her anxious father, and her lover, suffering still stronger agitation—confident, indeed, in the virtue of his mistress, yet trembling lest she might suffer from the wantonness of Pan. Thus attended, the virgin, with a meek and modest, yet intrepid dignity, descends into the cave. What a group for the pencil! New pictures succeed.—The doors of the cave now close upon her. What a moment of universal anxiety!—The pipe begins to sound with peculiar sweetness—the doors unfold, and the virgin ascends to honour and to love. What a scene of triumph and ecstasy for her father and her future husband!

In the same romance we have another trial of virgin purity, intitled, “The Trial of
the

the Stygian Fountain." The ceremonial of it is thus described:—A maiden accused of impurity swears that the accusation is false. Her oath is inscribed on a small tablet, and, with this suspended to her neck, she descends into the fountain. If she has sworn falsely, the water begins to swell, and rises till, reaching her neck, it overwhelms the tablet; but, if she is a genuine maid, the placid water continues below her knee, and the triumphant virgin, having remained her appointed time in the fountain, is led out of it by the applauding priest*.

In the romance, which bears the name of the learned bishop Eustathius, a similar trial occurs. That amusing author describes a temple of Diana, in which was a golden statue of the Goddess bending her bow; at her feet flowed a murmuring fountain, by which the chaste Divinity used to prove the innocence of her votaries. The suspected virgin was conducted into

* Achilles Tatius, lib. viii.

this mysterious water with a crown of laurel on her head. If she was really pure, the Goddess did not extend her bow, the water remained calm, and the maiden passed quietly through it, retaining her laurel crown on her head ; but if (to copy the expression of Eustathius) the breath of Venus had extinguished her virgin lamp, Diana directed her bow against the pretended virgin, and seemed to aim at her head. The affrighted culprit hid herself in the stream to avoid the shaft, and her laurel wreath was washed off by the murmuring water *.

Incidents of this kind seem to belong to romance ; yet the learned editor of Eustathius, in a note to this story, has produced a similar anecdote from a grave historian. He quotes a passage from an unpublished Greek chronicle of Constantinople, which informs us, that a statue of Venus in that city had this formidable attribute of discovering the foibles of the fair : it ascertained

* Eustathius de Ismenia et Ismenes Amoribus, lib. viii.

the purity of married women and of virgins, both rich and poor; but at last, says the chronicle, the sister of Justin's wife destroyed the statue for having detected her frailty *.

The only remains of these superstitious and fantastic trials of virginity, that have descended to our more refined and enlightened age, appear in the common jest of trying to rekindle by the breath an extinguished candle. Pasquier, the learned French antiquarian, has written a chapter on this sportive custom: he does not, indeed, attempt to discover its origin, but gravely takes occasion from the idea to assert the despicable emptiness of all animal pleasure, and to affirm, on the authority of Tertullian, that the happiness of woman consists in her virginity †.

I shall close this miscellaneous chapter by acquainting the chaste sisterhood with many vain attempts that I have made to

* Eustathius Gaulmini, *Notarum*, p. 37.

† Pasquier, *Recherches*, lib. viii. chap. 22.

elucidate a very mysterious proverb, by which their whole order is preposterously condemned to a very strange and unworthy destiny; I mean the proverb, which says, that Old Maids are doomed "to lead apes in hell." After consulting the profoundest antiquarians of our own country, and some upon the continent, I am still unable to ascertain the origin of this remarkable saying. One of my ingenious friends is convinced that it was invented by the Monks, to allure opulent females into the cloister, by teaching them, that if they did not become the spouses either of man or God, they must expect to be united, in a future world, to the most impertinent and disgusting companion. For my own part, I am inclined to rank an idea so injurious to my fair friends among the dismal and despicable superstitions of Ægypt, as I find a passage in Hermes Trismegistus, which says, that those who die childless are, immediately after their death, tormented by demons.

demons*. I must confess, however, that from the very high respect which the Ægyptians entertained for the ape, the demons intended by Trismegistus could hardly be of that figure. Indeed, the affectionate adoration which apes have sometimes received, as we learn from the pious poet Prudentius†, has at times led me to conjecture, that the saying in question might have arisen in some country where it bore a very different meaning from what we annex to it at present; where this destiny of the ancient virgin was intended, not as the punishment, but the reward of her continence.

I do not recollect to have seen the expression of *leading apes* in any English author before Shirley the dramatic poet. In his comedy, called the School of Compliment, printed in 1637, there is a scene, in

* Trismegisti, lib. ix.

† Venerem precaris, comprecare et simiam.

Prudentius.

which,

which, to humour the madness of Infortunio, the several characters on the stage pretend to be damned. Delia, among the rest, declares, that "she was damned for
" being a stale virgin, and that her punishment was to *lead apes in hell.*"

A living poet of our country seems to have wished to make the sisterhood amends for the insult of this injurious proverb, by assigning a place to Old Maids in his poetical elysium. As the friend and advocate of the chaste community, I transcribe with singular pleasure the following verses, in which their neglected merits are so liberally distinguished.

" *Turn to this chearful band, and mark in this*
" *Spirits who justly claim my realms of bliss !*
" *Most lovely these ! when judg'd by generous*
" *truth,*

" *Tho' beauty is not theirs, nor blooming*
" *youth ;*

" *For these are they, who, in life's thorny*
" *shade,*

" *Repin'd not at the name of ancient maid.*

" *No*

" No proud disdain, no narrowness of heart,
 " Held them from Hymen's tempting rites apart;
 " But fair discretion led them to withdraw
 " From the priz'd honour of his proffer'd law;
 " To quit the object of no hasty choice
 " In mild submission to a parent's voice;
 " The valued lover with a sigh resign,
 " And sacrifice delight at duty's shrine.
 " With smiles they bore, from angry spleen
 " exempt,
 " Injurious mockery and coarse contempt:
 " 'Twas theirs to elasp, each selfish care above,
 " A sister's orphans with parental love,
 " And all her tender offices supply,
 " Though bound not by the strong maternal tie;
 " 'Twas theirs to bid intestine quarrels cease,
 " And form the cement of domestic peace:
 " No throbbing joy their spotless bosom fir'd,
 " Save what Benevolence herself inspir'd;
 " No praise they sought, except that praise
 " refin'd,
 " Which the heart whispers to the worthy
 " mind*."

* Hayley's Triumphs of Temper, canto v. ver. 563.

C H A P. II.

*Containing the Discussion of a very delicate
and important Question.*

AS good fortune has thrown into my hands a manuscript oration on a topic highly interesting to the sisterhood, I shall insert it in this chapter; and, to gratify, to the utmost of my power, the curiosity of my fair readers, I shall introduce it by a little history of the incidents which have enabled me to enrich my work with so singular an embellishment.

A few years ago I had the happiness of ranking among my friends a gentleman of the most amiable singularity. He was a baronet of an ancient family, and very ample possessions, in the North of England. His father, who had all the convivial spirit so prevalent in that part of our island, paid a very heavy tax for his bacchanalian en-
 VOL. III. M joyments,

joyments, in suffering the frequent visits of an excruciating gout, and in dying at last a martyr of the bottle. My friend Sir Hilary Highman had all the natural vivacity of his father; he loved pleasure as well, but, warned by so striking an example, he resolved to pursue it, though with equal ardour, yet in paths of less peril.

While his father was yet living, he discovered in his own frame, young as it was, some traces of that formidable distemper, to which parental intemperance had given him too good a title. This tendency he wisely determined to counteract, by a steady adherence to the most simple diet. Yet, as he was unwilling to irritate the growing ill-humour of a parent whom he tenderly regarded, he engaged not in this degenerate regimen, till he had taken leave of the jovial, testy, and crippled old gentleman, to embark in a favourite project of visiting the ruins of Greece. An opposite conduct might have endangered his future fortune; as the impetuous old toper detested the
character

character of a milk-sop, and would not, perhaps, have scrupled to disinherit a son, merely for renouncing that festive poison, which had destroyed his own temper, and was rapidly preying on the dregs of his exhausted life. My friend, indeed, when he set out on his travels, relying on the strength of his father's constitution, entertained a very lively hope of amusing the old knight, on his return, with a history of his adventures. But the fates determined otherwise. A long scene of election festivity hurried this hearty friend of Bacchus to the grave; and the temperate Sir Hilary was recalled from the ruins of Athens, to take possession of an estate large enough to furnish every kind of luxury to an attic imagination. Abstemious as he was, Sir Hilary was a genuine disciple of Epicurus; he considered pleasure as the universal aim of every sensible being; but the pleasure he courted was only such as arises from the indulgence of an elegant fancy and a benevolent heart. He was

particularly fond of female society ; and his passions were vehement, though tender ; a Grecian lady, of exquisite beauty and accomplishments, inflamed them to the highest degree, and he had been privately married to her many months, when the intelligence arrived which recalled him to his country. The delights arising from his new connection, and the general state of his father's ruined health and temper, allowed him not to feel any great poignancy or grief, though he frequently spoke of the departed old gentleman with a grateful and tender regret. Sir Hilary was far from shewing any eagerness to take possession of the princely opulence which had now devolved to him. His affectionate attention to his lovely Greek, rendered his travels homeward particularly slow. This fair partner of his fortune was advanced in pregnancy. Her husband would have kindly waited the event on the coast of Asia Minor, of which she was a native ; but it was settled, at the request of the lady, that they should

should proceed on their way to England as far as Rome, where she had the happiness of presenting to Sir Hilary two lovely boys, not inferior to the twin founders of the imperial city. The exulting mother soon recovered her strength with increasing loveliness; and the whole party arrived, with chequered sensations of joy and sorrow, at the paternal seat of Sir Hilary. The young baronet paid all decent honours to the memory of his father, and handsomely provided for a few old domestics, who had shared both the joviality and the infirmities of their late master. He soon began to new-model his house, and to regulate his establishment. In both it was his chief aim to unite elegance with comfort, and gaiety with temperance. He built a very spacious library, with an adjoining saloon; the latter was well furnished with a few admirable pictures, and the former completely enriched with books, busts, and statues. Sir Hilary had imbibed very early an extreme passion for Grecian literature, which the incidents

of his life had tended to increase. He particularly admired that cast of conversation which used to form the most delightful part of an ancient attic entertainment, and he often wished to substitute something of this nature in the room of those dull or disgusting topics of discourse, which produce such a heavy effect in the rural visits of our English gentry. He was a hearty friend to every harmless, social pleasure; but he wished to give a little tincture of literary refinement to his convivial neighbourhood. This was no easy task; yet Sir Hilary accomplished it: and indeed there is hardly any enterprize too hard for a man, who possessed, as he did, engaging manners with warm philanthropy, and a very abundant portion of opulence and wit. Events, however, happened luckily to facilitate his design. On his extensive estate there were two livings of considerable value; they had been occupied by two orthodox toppers, promoted by the old baronet for their uniform adherence to the bottle. These honest di-
vines

vines had drank so deeply together to the memory of the good old knight, that they soon finished their last bumper on earth, and slept in peace with their patron. Sir Hilary seized, with great pleasure, this opportunity of settling in his neighbourhood two gentlemen whose habits of life were congenial with his own. He was happy in bestowing ease and independence on two liberal men, with whom he had contracted an intimacy at college, and who had been the associates of his early studies. They were persons of equal integrity, but of different characters. Literature was the passion of each; but the first valued learning only as it lead him to the serious practice of virtue; the second loved it as the most pleasing exercise of an active and playful spirit. Opposite as they were in their dispositions, they had a perfect esteem for each other, and for the amiable patron, who considered their society as one of the highest gratifications that propitious fortune had bestowed upon him. These clerical friends

were both in the prime of life; and, as they were both unmarried, they were particularly careffed by the families around them. By the aid of these gentlemen, with a third clergyman, who refided under his roof as a domestic chaplain, and his affiftant in the education of his children, Sir Hilary commenced an institution, which contributed not a little to the amufement of himfelf and his acquaintance. At the full of every moon, it was his cuftom to give a very elegant entertainment to the gentry of his neighbourhood. On thefe days, in the interval between tea and fupper, orations were read or fpoken in the fpacious library, on a fubject propofed at the preceding affembly. It was the Banquet of Plato, an author in whom Sir Hilary delighted, that firft infpired him with this idea: and in thefe Englifh dialogues the moral fpirit of that fublime Grecian was fometimes very happily copied, without any mixture of the grofs indecency, with which the moft engaging of his productions is miferably difgraced.

Sir Hilary did not confine his entertainment to prosaic discourses ; but professed himself equally obliged to those guests, who produced either a prose dissertation, or a poetical *jeu d'esprit* on the topic of the day. The verses were deposited on a large library table, and usually read by Sir Hilary's secretary, who acted as clerk to the assembly, before the orations began ; which were generally delivered by their respective authors, and sometimes without any premeditation. Extempore verses, composed upon the spot, were also kindly received ; and if thrown on the table while the assembly was sitting, they were read by the clerk, when the orations were closed, as a kind of epilogue to the amusements of the day.

I happened to meet my old acquaintance Sir Hilary in London, at a time when I was greatly reduced by a severe and lingering illness. He kindly insisted on my passing a few weeks with him at his country seat, in the friendly hope of contributing to the recovery of my health, affirming, with his usual

usual pleasantry, that one of his attic banquets would prove to me a nervous cordial; and conduce, more than the most fashionable medicines, to the revival of a literary invalid. My friend's institution was now indeed in a very flourishing state. Sir Hilary had, by degrees, diffused around his neighbourhood a spirit of amicable and elegant emulation. He had particularly caressed and animated the young people in the genteel families around him, and in the course of a few years he had formed, in his assembly, a little band of orators, whom Athens herself might have listened to with pleasure. The ladies, though they never so far forgot the delicacy of their sex as to declaim in these meetings, yet contributed not a little to the general amusement, by various compositions.

As to myself, I wished in vain for powers to take an active part in the pleasing ceremony of the place; but my health was still so weak, that I dared not venture on any kind of mental exertion. I had, however,

before this period, conceived the first idea of my present work, and, wishing to derive all the advantages I could from this accomplished society, I requested my friend Sir Hilary to propose the following question as a subject of debate in one of his assemblies : —“ Which is the more eligible for a wife, “ a Widow, or an Old Maid ?” — My lively friend very cheerfully acquiesced in my proposal ; and the topic gave birth to much innocent pleasantry, and to some serious argument. I heartily wish it were in my power to enrich these volumes with many of the pieces, both in prose and rhyme, that were produced on this occasion ; but all that I was allowed to treasure up, amounts only to three epigrams, and a single oration. It is, however, the very oration that I was most solicitous to obtain ; for, alas ! with grief I confess, that although seven orators harangued upon the question, one alone had generosity enough to argue on the side of the neglected sisterhood ; with what powers of rhetoric, my reader will very soon have the

the opportunity of judging. I shall first produce the poetical *jeux d'esprit*. The first of the three following epigrams was found, with other pieces of poetry, on the library table, and were recited, according to the ceremonial I have mentioned, before the orations began; the others were literally produced extempore, and of course were not read till the speeches were closed; but as they arose from the preceding epigram, I shall here insert them united.

E P I G R A M

On this Question,

“ Which is the more eligible for a Wife,
“ a Widow, or an Old Maid ?”

*Ye, who to wed the sweetest wife would try,
Observe how men a sweet Cremona buy !
New violins they seek not from the trade,
But one, on which some good musician play'd :
Strings never try'd some harshness will produce ;
The fiddle's harmony improves by use.*

IMPROMPTU

IMPROMPTU

On the preceding Epigram.

*One rule will Wives and Fiddles fit,
Is falsely said, I fear, by wit,
To sad experience blind :
For Woman's an Æolian harp,
Whose every note, or flat or sharp,
Depends upon the wind.*

A REPLY

To the two Epigrammatists.

*Fiddles and Harps no more compare
(Improper symbols!) to the Fair,
However they attract!
Ye wits! for Woman let me see,
If Music will not yield to me,
Justly to grace
The female race,
An image more exact!*

*Woman, I say, or dame or lass,
Is an Harmonica of glass,
Celestial and complete:*

If

*If new, or by some trials known,
It matters not
A single jot;
When rightly touch'd, its every tone
Is ravishingly sweet.*

There were other verses recited, of a more serious cast. Some juvenile bards wandered a little from the subject; and a young Oxonian forgot the respect due to both parties concerned in the question; for, instead of deciding the point in debate, he satirized both the Widow and the Old Maid with much sarcastic wit, and concluded with a most animated panegyric on a blooming girl of eighteen.

More than one poet, however, pleaded the cause of the Widow with energy and pathos; but the frail nymphs of Parnassus were so unfriendly to the claims of the elderly virgin sisterhood, that no bard appeared to sing decidedly in favour of the poor Old Maid: nor will this circumstance be thought surprising, when we recollect,

collect, that among the orators (a more reasonable set of men than the sportive sons of Apollo) the Old Maiden found only a single advocate. Of the six speakers who argued with vehemence for the Widow, the most amusing was a lively and honest fox-hunter, not remarkable for erudition, but possessed of strong mental powers in a robust constitution, and happy in a rich vein of original humour. This gentleman was actually in chace of a young, opulent, and lovely Widow. He gloried in this pursuit, and, being animated with the fairest prospect of success, he spoke with peculiar force and felicity on the topic of the day. I must confess, that he sometimes threw the audience into a kind of panic, by appearing to gallop very fast towards the precipice of indecency; but whenever he found himself on the brink of it, he rapidly made so delicate and dexterous a turn, that he converted the terrors of the company into ease, admiration, and good-humour.

The debate on this side of the question
was

was closed by a speaker of an opposite character. He was a gentleman of extensive learning and a grave deportment, yet easy in his address and forcible in his elocution. He gave us a serious yet entertaining history of widowhood, and enumerated the happy events, and the illustrious characters, to which the second marriage of some eminent Widows had given birth. When his peroration was ended, which, being tender and pathetic, formed a pleasing contrast to the humorous arguments of his predecessor, a gentleman arose, who possessed, with a very graceful person, an uncommon archness of countenance; and in a voice peculiarly melodious, he delivered the following oration:

“ Mr. President,

“ Though I was aware that a very formidable majority of speakers would appear against me, it is yet with confidence
“ that I engage on the unpopular side of
“ the present question; a question upon
“ which

“ which the prejudices, the passions, and
 “ the practice of mankind, are in direct
 “ opposition to the clearest dictates of rea-
 “ son and of justice ! Yes ! Sir, I will be
 “ so bold as to affirm, that if the conduct
 “ and the opinions of men were under the
 “ steady guidance of equity, this question
 “ could not remain doubtful, for a single
 “ minute, in the mind of any man ; it must
 “ be decided, without a moment’s hesita-
 “ tion, in favour of that injured, that de-
 “ rided being, the involuntary Old Maid,
 “ whose advocate I profess myself : nor
 “ would such a decision depend on any
 “ prior sentiments, which the arbiter might
 “ form to the discredit, or to the glory, of
 “ wedlock ; for, whether we consider mar-
 “ riage as a burthen or as an enjoyment, it
 “ is equally unjust that any female should
 “ twice suffer that burthen, or be twice
 “ indulged in that enjoyment, while an-
 “ other, at the same period of life, is kept
 “ an utter stranger to the cares or to the
 “ delights of an important office, which
 VOL. III. N “ she

“ she is equally ready to assume, and
 “ equally able to support. This position
 “ is, I trust, so evident, that, if I could
 “ convert this assembly into the supreme
 “ court of judicature, and bring to its bar
 “ both the Widow and the Old Maid, as
 “ rival claimants of the nuptial coronet, on
 “ the mere principles of right, I am per-
 “ suaded the integrity of this audience
 “ would soon terminate the contest, and
 “ ratify the title of my client by an unani-
 “ mous decree. But, alas ! in this point
 “ there is no tribunal on earth, to which
 “ the disconsolate Old Maiden can success-
 “ fully apply for substantial justice. The
 “ clamour of prejudice is against her, and
 “ her pretensions are derided; while custom
 “ and commodity,

“ ‘ *That smooth-fac’d gentleman, tickling com-*
 “ *modity,*’

“ are such active and prosperous agents
 “ for her antagonist, the Widow, that she,
 “ this insidious antagonist ! is admitted,
 “ perhaps

“ perhaps, three, four, or even five times
 “ to the recent altar of Hymen, while my
 “ unfortunate client, the neglected Old
 “ Maid, however wishfully she may look
 “ towards the portal, is not allowed to find
 “ even a temporary shelter within a por-
 “ tico of the temple.—Can this, Sir, be
 “ called equity? Is it not injustice? Is it
 “ not barbarity?—But I may be told, that in
 “ the common occurrences of life, in a trans-
 “ action such as marriage, peculiarly subject
 “ to fancy and caprice, we must not expect,
 “ we must not require men to observe the
 “ nicer dictates of strict equity, and a spe-
 “ culative rule of right.—Be it so!—I will
 “ not, therefore, on this important question,
 “ appeal solely to the consciences of men;
 “ I will appeal to their interests. I will
 “ prove to them, that he who marries an
 “ Old Maid, has a much greater chance of
 “ being invariably beloved by his wife, or,
 “ in other words, of being happy in wed-
 “ lock, than he has, who rashly throws
 “ himself into the open arms of a Widow.

“ —Sir, I flatter myself, it will require no
“ long chain of arguments to establish and
“ fortify, on the most solid ground, this
“ momentous position. I trust that I shall
“ be able to accomplish it, merely by re-
“ minding this audience of a propensity in
“ the human mind, which cannot be called
“ in question; I mean the propensity to
“ exalt in our estimation those possessions
“ of which we are deprived, and to sink
“ the value of what is actually in our
“ hands.—Sir, the first part of this pro-
“ pensity is so general, and it operates with
“ such amazing force on the character to
“ whom I wish to apply it, that I remem-
“ ber the admirable Fielding, with a most
“ happy coincidence of humour and of
“ truth, calls the death of an husband ‘ an
“ infallible recipe to recover the lost af-
“ fections of a wife.’

“ Let me, Sir, entreat this assembly to
“ retain in their thoughts the propensity I
“ have mentioned, and then to contemplate
“ with me the feelings of the late Widow

“ towards her second or third husband, and
 “ the feelings of the quondam Old Maid,
 “ now joyfully united to her first and only
 “ love.—Sir, the affection of the re-married
 “ Widow is a pocket telescope ; she directs
 “ the magnifying end of it towards her
 “ good man in the grave, and it enlarges
 “ to a marvellous degree all the mental
 “ and all the personal endowments of the
 “ dear departed. She then turns the in-
 “ verted glass to his diminishing successor,
 “ and, whatever his proportion of excel-
 “ lence may be, the poor luckless living
 “ mortal soon dwindles in her sight to a
 “ comparative pigmy. But, Sir, this is
 “ not the case with our quondam Old
 “ Maid. No ! Sir—her affection is a porta-
 “ ble microscope, which magnifies in a stu-
 “ pendous manner all the attractive merits
 “ and powers of pleasing, however incon-
 “ siderable they may be, in the favourite
 “ creature upon whom she gazes. Like
 “ an inexperienced but a passionate natura-
 “ list, she continues to survey the new and

“ sole object of her contemplation, not
“ only with unremitted assiduity, but with
“ increasing amazement and delight. He
“ fills her eye ; he occupies her mind ; he
“ engrosses her heart.

“ But it may be said in reply, If the
“ man who marries an Old Maid has this
“ superior chance of being uniformly be-
“ loved by his wife, since it is certainly the
“ wish of every man who marries to be so,
“ how happens it that men decide so pre-
“ posterously against themselves, and per-
“ petually prefer the Widow to the Old
“ Maid ? Is not this constant preference a
“ very strong argument in favour of the
“ character so preferred ? Does it not
“ prove, that the Widow has acquired the
“ art, or the power, of conferring more
“ happiness on her second husband than
“ the Old Maid is able to bestow upon her
“ first ? for can we suppose that men, in-
“ structed by the experience of ages, would
“ continue to act in constant opposition to
“ their

“ their own domestic happiness, in the
 “ most important article of human life ?

“ Alas ! Sir, I fear there are more arti-
 “ cles than one, in which we inconsiderate
 “ mortals may be frequently observed to
 “ act against experience, against our rea-
 “ son, and against our felicity. That the
 “ Widow is constantly preferred to the Old
 “ Maid, I most readily admit ; nay, I
 “ complain of it as an inveterate grievance ;
 “ but I trust, Sir, that I can account for
 “ this unreasonable preference, without
 “ adding a single grain to the weight, or
 “ rather to the empty scale, of the Widow.

“ I believe, Sir, a very simple meta-
 “ phor will illustrate the whole affair on
 “ both sides.

“ The Widow is an experienced and a
 “ skilful angler, who has acquired patience
 “ to wait for the favourable minute, and
 “ rapidity to strike in the very instant
 “ when the fish has fairly risen to the hook.
 “ By this double excellence her success is
 “ ensured. But alas ! Sir, the Old Maid

“ is an angler, whom fruitless expectation
“ has rendered both impatient and unskil-
“ ful; she is thrown into trepidation by
“ the first appearance of a *nibble*, and by
“ making a too hasty movement at that
“ critical juncture, she too often renders
“ her bait, however sweet it may be, an
“ object of terror, instead of allurements,
“ to what she wishes to catch. Though
“ my allusion may sound a little coarsely,
“ let me entreat you, Sir, not to imagine
“ that I mean to express any degree of dis-
“ respect to my honest and worthy client,
“ the unprosperous Old Maid. Allow me,
“ Sir, to remind you, that ingenuous and
“ unhackneyed spirits, though actively in-
“ clined, are often reduced to do nothing,
“ by their too eager desire to do well;
“ and this is frequently the case of the
“ good and delicate Old Maid, in her
“ laudable project of securing a husband:
“ so that even when she is herself the cause
“ of her own failure in this worthy purpose,
“ she deserves not our censure but our
“ compassion.

“ compassion. Yes! Sir, the partizans of
 “ the Widow may smile, if they please, at
 “ my assertion; but I scruple not to af-
 “ firm, that the solitary, neglected Old
 “ Maid is more truly entitled to pity, than
 “ soft harbinger of love, than the weeping
 “ Widow herself. Much has been said,
 “ and, I confess, with great eloquence, on
 “ the Widow’s attractive sorrow. It is, in-
 “ deed, *attractive*; and so attractive, that
 “ it has frequently recalled to my imagi-
 “ nation the moan of the hyæna, that art-
 “ ful, destructive, and insatiable creature,
 “ who is said by the ancient naturalists to
 “ lure into her den, by a treacherous cry
 “ of distress, the unwary traveller whom
 “ she intends to devour. This insidious
 “ behaviour of the hyæna is a questionable
 “ fact, that no one, perhaps, can fully
 “ prove or refute; but all persons of any
 “ experience in the world have seen in-
 “ stances of men, who have been allured
 “ into the snare of the Widow, and have
 “ lamented, when it was too late to re-
 “ treat,

“ treat, that they fell the victims of their
“ own generous, but misplaced compassion.

“ The habit of changing is very apt to
“ produce a passion for novelty; and the
“ wife, who has buried one or two husbands, on a slight disagreement with her
“ second or third, will soon wish him to
“ sleep in peace with his departed predecessor, from her hope of being more
“ lucky in her next adventure. You may
“ remember, Sir, that our old poet Chaucer, that admirable and exact painter of
“ life and manners! has very happily
“ marked this prevalent disposition of the
“ re-married Widow, in the long prologue
“ which he assigns to his Wife of Bath.
“ That good lady glories in having already buried four husbands, and expresses
“ a perfect readiness, whenever Heaven
“ may give her the opportunity, to engage
“ with a sixth. Let it not be said, that this
“ character is a mere phantom, created by
“ the lively imagination of a satirical and
“ facetious poet! No! Sir, this venerable,
“ though

“ though sportive old bard, copied na-
 “ ture most faithfully : and, as a proof
 “ that he did so in the present case, I will
 “ mention a more marvellous example of
 “ this passion in the re-marrying Widow
 “ for an unlimited succession of novelties.
 “ Sir, the example I mean, is recorded in
 “ an ecclesiastical writer of great authority,
 “ whose name I cannot in this moment re-
 “ collect ; but I remember he mentions it
 “ as a fact, which happened at Rome, and
 “ to which he was himself an eye-witness.
 “ This fact, Sir, was the marriage of a
 “ widow to her *twenty-second husband*. The
 “ man also had buried *twenty wives* ; and
 “ all the eyes of Rome were fixed on this
 “ singular pair, as on a couple of gladiators,
 “ anxious to see which would conduct the
 “ other to the grave. If I remember
 “ right, the woman, after all her funeral
 “ triumphs, was the victim in this wonder-
 “ ful conflict : but the story, however it
 “ might terminate, sufficiently proves the
 “ passion for novelty, which I have ascribed

“ to the Widow. Now, Sir, if the second
“ or third husband of a Widow may have
“ frequent cause to imagine, that his lady’s
“ transferrable affections are veering to-
“ ward his probable successor, he cannot
“ surely be so happy, or secure, as the man
“ who has more wisely united himself to a
“ worthy Old Maid. She, good soul! re-
“ membering how long she waited for her
“ first husband, instead of hastily looking
“ forward to a second, will direct all her at-
“ tention to cherish and preserve the dear
“ creature, whom she at last acquired after
“ tedious expectation. Her good man has
“ no rival to fear, either among the living
“ or the dead; and may securely enjoy the
“ delightful prerogative of believing him-
“ self the absolute master of his wife’s af-
“ fections. I entreat you, Sir, to observe
“ how very different the case is with the in-
“ considerate man, who rashly married a
“ Widow! He has not only to apprehend
“ that the changeable tenderness of his
“ lady may take a sudden turn towards his
“ probable

“ probable successor, but, if her thoughts
 “ are too faithful, and too virtuous, to wan-
 “ der towards the living, even then, Sir,
 “ after all his endeavours to take full pos-
 “ session of her heart, though he may de-
 “ lude himself with the vain idea of being
 “ its sole proprietor, he will frequently find,
 “ that he has only entered into partnership
 “ with a ghost. Yes! Sir, though my op-
 “ ponents may treat the expression as ludi-
 “ crous, I will maintain that it is literally
 “ just. I repeat, he has entered into part-
 “ nership with a ghost; and I will add, Sir,
 “ the very probable consequence of such a
 “ partnership: he will soon find, that, by
 “ the subtle illusions of his invisible partner,
 “ he has lost even his poor moiety in that
 “ precarious possession, the heart of a re-
 “ married Widow! and will find himself, at
 “ the same time, a real bankrupt in happi-
 “ ness. Since my antagonists have been
 “ pleased to smile at my expression, as the
 “ language rather of fancy than of truth,
 “ suffer me, Mr. President, to quote a case,
 “ in

“ in which this dead, this derided partner
“ made his actual appearance, and was bold
“ enough to urge an exclusive claim. Sir,
“ I trust the case I allude to is a case di-
“ rectly in point; it is quoted, indeed, on
“ a different occasion, by the admirable
“ Addison, from the seventeenth book of
“ the Jewish historian, Josephus. I mean
“ the case of the Widow Glaphyra, who,
“ having been twice a Widow, took for
“ her third husband Archelaus. You may
“ remember, Sir, that the thoughts of this
“ lady, after her third adventure, ran so
“ much on her first lord, that she saw the
“ good man in a vision—‘ Glaphyra,’ said
“ the phantom, ‘ thou hast made good the
“ old saying, that women are not to be
“ trusted. Was not I the husband of thy
“ virginity? Have I not children by thee?
“ How couldst thou forget our loves so far
“ as to enter into a second marriage, and
“ after that into a third? — But for our
“ passed loves I will free thee from thy pre-
“ sent reproach, and make thee mine for
“ ever.”

“ ever.’—Glaphyra related her dream, and
 “ died soon after. This, Sir, is a serious
 “ and tragical proof, how dangerous it is to
 “ marry a Widow. Surely no considerate
 “ man would chuse to incur the hazard of
 “ having his bride thus torn from his em-
 “ braces by so arrogant a phantom.—Al-
 “ low me, Sir, to relate a story of a comic
 “ cast, which will equally prove the secret
 “ perils of such a marriage. I received it
 “ from a very worthy old gentleman, not
 “ unknown to this assembly. He was ac-
 “ quainted, in his youth, with a famous
 “ mimic of the last century, who was the
 “ principal actor in this comic or rather
 “ farcical scene, and related it circumstan-
 “ tially to my friend. This mimic, Sir, a
 “ man of pleasantry and adventure, court-
 “ ed, in the early part of his life, a very
 “ handsome and opulent Widow; she gave
 “ him the highest encouragement; but, as
 “ avarice was her foible, she at last jilted
 “ him for a wealthy suitor, who, though
 “ of a very timid constitution, was rash
 “ enough

“ enough to marry this very tempting Wi-
“ dow. The discarded mimic was inflamed
“ with a variety of passions, and determined
“ to take some very signal revenge. An
“ opportunity of vengeance occurred to
“ him, which, as he knew the extreme ti-
“ midity of his fortunate rival, he seized
“ without the pause of apprehension. His
“ valet had intrigued with the favourite
“ abigail of the Widow, and by her assist-
“ ance the mimic commanded the nuptial
“ chamber of the bride. He had known
“ the person of her first husband, and, hav-
“ ing concealed himself under a toilet till
“ the hour of consummation, he then made
“ his appearance, assuming the most exact
“ similitude, both in figure and voice, to
“ the dear departed. He had hardly un-
“ drawn the curtain, when the affrighted
“ bride fell into a fit. The bridegroom,
“ who had also known his deceased prede-
“ cessor, was seized with a panic still worse,
“ and his trembling body soon diffused so
“ powerful an effluvia, that although it
“ contributed

“ contributed nothing to his own relief,
 “ it recovered the lady from her swoon.
 “ She revived in perfect possession of her
 “ senses, and, finding the dead husband
 “ vanished, and the living one unfit for a
 “ companion, she hastily arose. As she
 “ loved money, she had taken the prudent
 “ precaution of securing to herself the en-
 “ joyment of her own fortune, and, having
 “ some suspicion of the trick which had
 “ been played against her, she resolved to
 “ make a wise use of it, and declared,
 “ that she would never proceed to consum-
 “ mate her marriage with a man, who had
 “ not resolution enough to protect her
 “ from a ghost. She persisted in this con-
 “ duct, and the luckless derided bride-
 “ groom remained, through life, a melan-
 “ choly example to confirm the wisdom of
 “ that adage, which says, that he should,
 “ indeed, be a bold man, who enters into
 “ the service of a Widow.

“ Sir, I should entreat your pardon for
 Vol. III. O “ having

“ having trespassed on the patience of this
“ assembly by the recital of so long a story,
“ did I not flatter myself that it will have
“ a happy tendency to guard the single
“ gentlemen, who hear me, from the ini-
“ quitous temerity of preferring a Widow
“ to an Old Maid.

“ I might alledge, Sir, many arguments
“ which I have not hitherto touched upon,
“ in favour of my client. I might shew
“ of what infinite importance it is to ma-
“ trimonial felicity, that the husband
“ should receive into his arms a partner
“ for life, whose disposition and habits, in-
“ stead of being fixed already by a former
“ lord, are yet to be moulded according
“ to the will and abilities of her first and
“ only director. Sir, in this point, the
“ Widow is a piece of warped wood, which
“ the most skilful workman may find him-
“ self unable to shape as he wishes; but
“ the Old Maid, Sir, is the pliant virgin
“ wax, which follows, with the most happy
“ ductility,

“ ductility, every serious design, every ingenious device, every sportive whim, of the modeller.

“ But I will relinquish the innumerable arguments that I might yet adduce in support of the Old Maid; I will rest her cause on that solid rock, which I have endeavoured, Sir, to exhibit in different points of view, I mean the superior security with which her husband may depend on the stability of her affection. I will conclude by conjuring every gentleman, who may happen to hesitate between a Widow and an Old Maid, to remember, that reason and experience, that equity and the general interest of mankind, all loudly plead for his preferring the latter: I will conjure him to recollect, that the man who marries a Widow has great cause to apprehend unreasonable expectations, unpleasant comparisons, and variable affection; while he, who marries an Old Maid, may with confidence prepare to meet unexacting

O 2

“ tenderness,

“tenderness, increasing gratitude, and per-
“petual endearments.”

I will not presume to comment on the preceding oration; but merely add, that the ecclesiastical author, from whom the ingenious speaker has cited a most remarkable anecdote, is St. Jerom. It is contained in one of his epistles addressed to a Widow, whose name was Ageruchia. I shall transcribe the words of the saint at the bottom of the page *, and close this chapter by returning thanks to my eloquent friend, for the permission to print his speech, and by expressing a cordial wish, that my readers
may

* Rem dicturus sum incredibilem, sed multorum testimoniis approbatam. Ante annos plurimos, quum in chartis ecclesiasticis juvarem Damasum, Romanæ urbis episcopum, et Orientis atque Occidentis synodicis consultationibus responderem, vidi duo inter se paria, vilissimorum e plebè hominum comparata, unum qui viginti sepelisset uxores, alteram quæ vicesimum secundum habuisset maritum, extremo sibi,

may bestow on it as much favour and applause, as it received from the amicable and polite assembly in which it was delivered.

sibi, ut ipsi putabant, matrimonio copulatos. Summa omnium expectatio, virorum pariter ac feminarum, post tantas rudes, quis quem prius efferret: vicit maritus, et totius urbis populo confluyente, coronatus, et palmam tenens, adoremque per singulos sibi acclamantes, uxoris multinubæ feretrum præcedebat.

Epist. Sancti Hieron. ad Ageruchiam,
de Monogamia.

C H A P. III.

The concluding Chapter of the Essay, containing a Sermon to Old Maids, delivered in a Dream.

THE most sanguine projector that ever wasted his fortune and his brains in the smoke of expectation, never thought on the golden crown of all his labours with more assiduity and hope, than I have thought on the amusement and advantage, which, I trust, will accrue to the community of Old Maids from this elaborate Essay. The good spinsters have frequently engrossed me sleeping as well as waking. In proof of this affectionate assertion, I shall close my work with a circumstantial account of a very singular vision, which my extreme solicitude for their interest most certainly produced.

I had been reading, in a hot summer's
day,

day, a little too soon after dinner, one of the Greek homilies on virginity ; when my attention gradually diminished, and sleep imperceptibly stole upon me. I found myself transported on a sudden from my own narrow study, and a little circle of dingy folios, to the middle of a large and magnificent apartment. It appeared to be the refectory of a very populous convent : at the upper end of it were two doors ; the one, which stood open, discovered to me a very elegant and extensive chapel ; the other, as I found in the sequel, led into a set of apartments appropriated to the lady abbess of this chaste but unfettered society. I was soon informed, by a group of courteous females, who were walking for the purposes of exercise and conversation in this spacious hall, that the ample and sumptuous fabric had been raised by the contribution of many elderly virgins, all of liberal birth and education, though unequal in their fortunes, who, forming themselves into a very numerous yet friendly community,

*an incom-
table Dre*

nity, dwell together with quiet industry and social content.

“ We are governed,” said a kind and communicative sister of the house (who, with a disposition that appeared to me peculiarly angelical in an ancient virgin, expressed more eagerness to satisfy my curiosity than her own) “ we are governed by a
“ president of our own sex, who is annually
“ elected by a majority of our sisterhood;
“ but though we formally exert the privilege of election, we have never had but
“ one and the same governess; for the
“ lady who first planned, and has since directed, our society, is constantly rechosen
“ into the delicate and important office,
“ which she discharges to the satisfaction
“ of all with whom she is connected.”
“ How, Madam,” I exclaimed, “ how may
“ I obtain the happiness of beholding a
“ personage so extraordinary?” “ You will
“ probably behold her very soon,” replied my kind informer, “ returning into this
“ saloon from our adjoining chapel. You
“ may

“ may distinguish,” she continued, “ thro’
 “ that open door, a distant party engaged
 “ about the altar ; among them you may
 “ just discern our president Seraphina,
 “ with her two favourite assistants, Mele-
 “ sinda and Fuscina. They are employed
 “ in a melancholy yet pleasing office, in
 “ decorating the tomb of an amiable old
 “ divine, who formed a part of our house-
 “ hold, and was, indeed, to have appeared
 “ in the character of our pastor ; but as,
 “ from motives of maidenly discretion, we
 “ chose the good man in a very advanced
 “ and infirm period of life, he has never
 “ been able to ascend the pulpit prepared
 “ for him. We were afraid of wounding
 “ both him and ourselves, by appointing
 “ any substitute for him, while we could
 “ hope for his recovery, and have there-
 “ fore subsisted hitherto without any acting
 “ minister, except one selected from our-
 “ selves, for the mere purpose of reading
 “ the chapel service of the day ; for we are
 “ very punctual in our daily devotions ; and,
 “ now

“ now the good old man is departed, our
“ president will probably soon chuse for us
“ a preacher, who may fill more effectually
“ the department of the deceased.” My
pulse quickened as she spoke; but the
mingled sentiments of surprise, joy, and
ambition, rendered me unable to frame an
immediate reply. Never did the hot peri-
cranium of any dean or provost so itch and
burn for an expected mitre, as mine did at
this moment for a certain square cap of
white velvet, adorned with a silver tassel,
which now glittered in my view. It was
suspended to the wall of the saloon, at the
centre of the dining-table; and my good-
natured informer, who observed with what
an inquiring eye I surveyed it, very kindly
told me, it was the work of their fair presi-
dent, prepared as a mark of affectionate
distinction for the pastor of this maiden
flock. While this shining object of my
chaste ambition still attracted my eyes, and
I was still listening to several interesting
little anecdotes concerning it, the lady ab-
bess

bese and her attendants began to move towards me. My heart fluttered as they advanced. Though a considerable space was yet between us, I was struck with a trembling and speechless awe, by the air of complacent grandeur which appeared in the form and countenance of Seraphina. Never did a young volunteer, presented for the first time to the imperial Catherine of Russia, feel a more ardent, unutterable desire to serve his fair sovereign in the field or the cabinet, than I felt to recommend myself to the very different favours of this dignified lady. But how is it possible, thought I to myself, as she was approaching, to make her suddenly my patroness? Her character, and all her features, assure me, that she is utterly devoid of ambition and desire, those quick and powerful springs, by the means of which the fraternity of eloquent and able ministers have so often and so rapidly been exalted by the queens and abbeesses of their respective countries. But there is a nobler passion,

my

my heart inwardly said to itself, that, by actuating both of us alike, may facilitate my success with Seraphina; and this is our mutual zeal for the felicity of her fellow-maidens. Could this fair president of autumnal virgins, be made acquainted with all that I have thought, and all that I have written, in behalf of Old Maids—but here's my difficulty and distress; how can I explain to her, in a few minutes, the long labours of my life?—While these ideas were passing, with confused rapidity, in my mind, Seraphina advanced very near to me. The mild dignity of her aspect extorted from me a bow of affectionate admiration. I made an imperfect effort to tell her so; but, before I could utter a single sentence to recommend myself, as I wished, to her favour, she saluted me by my name, to my infinite astonishment; and proceeded to inform me, with a graceful and engaging familiarity, that the departed minister was one of my old friends, who had given her a complete idea both of my person and my character,

character, expressing a wish on his death-bed, in the most flattering terms, that I might be chosen to succeed him in the pastoral care of this sisterhood. "We are no
 "strangers," continued the polite Seraphina, "to the benevolent cast of your studies, and we look with peculiar gratitude
 "on a person, whose pen has been long
 "employed, with a very singular humanity,
 "to amuse, to instruct, and, I may say, to
 "honour, a certain class of females, whom
 "the unthinking world have incessantly
 "wounded with derision or neglect. It is
 "possible, Sir," she added, "that your
 "book, to which I allude, however enriched and adorned with learning and
 "with fancy, with reason and with wit; it
 "is possible, I say, that this book may not
 "find more kindness from the world,
 "than what has hitherto attended the
 "degraded order of beings to whom it
 "is so generously devoted. But, whatever fate may attend your work, whose
 "merits have been fully explained to us,
 "we

“ we shall at least enjoy the happiness of
“ securing you from many of those humili-
“ liating personal evils, to which the great-
“ est authors have been exposed, if you will
“ allow us to appoint you the preacher of
“ our chapel.”

Seraphina paused for my reply ; but my head and heart were too full to allow me the use of speech in the first moments of my surprise and exultation. I made her the profoundest reverence, that a body not perfectly elastic could accomplish. It was as low as the bow of a new-created bishop to his earthly maker, yet, I fear, it was not so much the genuine movement of humility, as of pride.

Seraphina seemed to read all my sentiments, and, to relieve me from the perplexing difficulty of putting my thanks into proper words, she thus pursued her discourse.

“ It is now the usual hour of our morn-
“ ing prayers : will you allow me, Sir, the
“ pleasure of introducing you to your new
“ office ?

“ office? You will find the books of our
 “ chapel in order; and I doubt not but, as
 “ you have long meditated on the good and
 “ evil of our single state, you can oblige us,
 “ on the instant, with a sermon adapted to
 “ our sequestered condition.”—Much as I
 was elated by the flattering appointment, I
 felt myself embarrassed by this proposal. In
 truth, I was utterly unprepared; and wished
 to excuse myself on the score of my dress,
 thinking it improper to appear as the pastor
 of these elegant, though ancient maidens, in
 a rusty black coat; which time and snuff had
 conspired to disfigure; but casting such a
 downward glance on my own person, as
 every man does, who means to ground an
 apology on his habit, I was astonished to
 find myself arrayed in a new cassock. My
 amazement increased, on perceiving that my
 right hand, which held a clean cambrick
 handkerchief, was decorated with a magni-
 ficent ring, not of diamond indeed, but
 formed by a single sapphire of uncommon
 magnitude and lustre. Without disturbing
 my

my brain to account for my acquisition of this surprising ornament, I bowed again to the fair president, and followed her towards the chapel. My ring had acted as a talisman to dispel my embarrassment, and I advanced with such an air of confidence, as I have formerly observed in a courtly preacher, apparently inspired, not indeed by the inward light of the soul, but by the radiance beaming from his own little finger.

We now entered the chapel: it was a structure of exquisite proportions, in which elegance and simplicity were most happily united. The walls were covered with a stucco of very pale dove-colour, enriched with decorations of white marble, consisting chiefly of emblematic figures, expressive of innocence and peace. The only painting which this edifice contained, was of glass; it formed the rich and magnificent window, to which the chapel was indebted for all the light it received. The effect of this window was truly celestial; not
only

only from the happy disposition of that soft and solemn radiance which it diffused over the building, but from the transcendant beauty of the figures with which it was enriched. Chastity was here represented in a meek yet firm position, supported by Temperance and Fortitude, and paying a kind of modest homage to Charity and Faith. The two latter were raised on a slight elevation, and, being united by a posture of sisterly endearment, formed the pyramidical point in this enchanting group. The distinct character of every personage was so exquisitely conceived, and so forcibly expressed; the connection of all was rendered so happily visible by their attention to each other, that no spectator could behold this little assembly of virtues, without feeling a tender reverence for each, and without wishing to become the perfect votary of all.

While I gazed on this enchanting picture, the bell began to toll: the numerous sisterhood came flocking to their seats: I advanced to the reading desk: I adjusted the

books: I went through the service: and now, with a heart that began to palpitate afresh, I ascended the pulpit. A multitude of curious and piercing eyes flashed upon me: but my embarrassment was a little relieved by a hymn of the divinest melody, most admirably sung by a few sisters of the house. In the time which this soothing ceremony allowed me to collect my hurried spirits, it struck me, that the unknown power to whom I was indebted for my cassock and my ring, might have happily supplied me with a supernatural sermon. In this hope I now searched my pockets, but, to my utter disappointment, I could find only a small copy of the Old Testament. In confusion and distress, I turned hastily to such passages, as I thought might befriend me on the present occasion. My eye suddenly fastened on a text that pleased me: I closed the volume; sat in profound thought for a few minutes; then rose, with inward exultation, and delivered the following discourse.

In

“ In the 11th Chapter of Judges, and at the
 “ 38th Verse, it is thus written —

“ *She went with her Companions, and be-
 “ wailed her Virginity.*”

“ ALAS! the tender-hearted might
 “ say to themselves, on first hearing these
 “ few and simple words, how frequent,
 “ how universal is such lamentation!—In
 “ every age, and in all the civilized nations
 “ of the globe, many inconsiderate daugh-
 “ ters of Eve have been hastily led into pe-
 “ nitence and sorrow, by the violence or the
 “ artifice of an imperious and a deceitful
 “ passion: and often have they bewailed the
 “ dishonourable loss of that maiden purity,
 “ regarded as the best, and perhaps the
 “ only treasure, which nature and fortune
 “ had bestowed upon them.

“ But it was not so with the fair
 “ mourner in my text: she was the chaste
 “ and honoured daughter of Jephtha, the
 “ Judge of Israel; she bewailed not the

“ loss of her virginity, but that she was
“ destined to carry it to the grave. Being
“ condemned to die, in compliance with
“ the rash vow of her father, she lamented
“ not the immediate stroke of death, but
“ the idea of dying without having fulfilled
“ her fair expectations of nuptial happiness
“ and maternal delight.

“ Before I proceed to any remarks on
“ this interesting story, let me here observe
“ to you, my sisters, that the learned and
“ pious men, who have endeavoured to
“ elucidate the obscurer passages of the
“ Old Testament, are by no means agreed
“ on the real fate of this lovely victim.
“ Some contend that she actually perished
“ by a violent death; and others affirm,
“ that she was only condemned to perpe-
“ tual virginity. I will not enter upon the
“ merits of this question, because, in what-
“ ever light the history of this fair sufferer
“ may be considered, it equally affords me
“ a proper ground-work for the doctrine I
“ wish to inculcate. Her sorrow, whatever

“ its duration might be, naturally leads me
 “ to point out to you a great and important
 “ truth; a truth, my sisters, in which you
 “ are principally concerned! and it is this—
 “ that to pass through human life, either
 “ by a short or a long journey, and finally
 “ to quit it in the character of a virgin,
 “ is by no means a just cause for lamenta-
 “ tion.

“ Do not mistake me, I mean not to re-
 “ flect, with a cruel asperity, on Jephtha's
 “ unhappy daughter! I mean not to insinu-
 “ ate aught against the temper or the mo-
 “ desty of the damsel; that would indeed
 “ be barbarous, when her strange mis-
 “ chance was so peculiarly severe, as to
 “ plead for the tenderest sympathy and
 “ compassion. *She came out to meet her*
 “ *victorious father, with timbrels and with*
 “ *dances; and she was his only child: be-*
 “ *side her he had neither son nor daughter.*
 “ How bitter must be the condition of this
 “ darling child, when she found her trium-
 “ phant festivity turned to anguish, by the

“vow of her precipitate parent! Every
“humane heart must bleed at the idea; and
“the more, when it remarks with what an
“affectionate magnanimity she submitted
“to her fate:—*And she said unto him, My*
“*father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto*
“*the Lord, do to me according to that which*
“*hath proceeded out of thy mouth, forasmuch*
“*as the Lord hath taken vengeance for thee of*
“*thine enemies.*—Generous, heroic maiden!
“she enjoyed the past triumph of her fa-
“ther, in her own present calamity and de-
“spair. Her first sentiments were those of
“the affectionate, disinterested daughter: if
“these were followed by a more selfish idea,
“it was suggested by a national custom,
“and arose not from any defects in the
“spirit and character of the devoted vic-
“tim. But let us hear how she proceeded!
“*And she said unto her father, Let this*
“*thing be done for me: let me alone two*
“*months, that I may go up and down upon*
“*the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I*
“*and my fellows!*—Strange as her request
“may

“ may sound in a modern ear, it appeared
 “ reasonable to her father; *and he said,*
 “ *Go!*—and well might he say so; for her
 “ petition was not the dictate of a wan-
 “ ton and dissolute spirit, preparing to la-
 “ ment the loss of expected pleasure, with
 “ coarseness of sentiment and indelicacy of
 “ language: no! it proceeded only from
 “ her wish to observe a religious ceremony,
 “ which prevailed among the unmarried fe-
 “ males of her country, who considered the
 “ destiny of living and of dying in a single
 “ state, as the severest evil that Heaven
 “ could inflict. This idea was indeed uni-
 “ versal among the Jews; but the Jews
 “ were a moody and a murmuring people,
 “ perpetually disposed to quarrel, not only
 “ with the common incidents of life, but
 “ with the most merciful dispensations of
 “ their God. It is the perversity of their
 “ general judgment on this head, and not
 “ the particular conduct of one most ami-
 “ able and unfortunate maiden, that I
 “ mean to censure. To guard the whole sis-

“terhood against the insidious approaches
“of discontent, I would here demonstrate;
“that to bewail virginity, in the Jewish
“sense of bewailing it, is equally irrational
“and irreligious.

“A custom, however reprehensible,
“which has prevailed among any civilized
“people, deserves to be fairly considered,
“and will generally be found to possess
“some important advantage to plead in its
“behalf. This was undoubtedly the case
“in the custom I allude to: it wanted not
“the plea of political wisdom: the female
“ceremony of bewailing virginity had as-
“suredly a strong tendency to promote
“wedlock, and in this point of view it me-
“rited the countenance of a wise legislator:
“—but observe with what cruelty it must
“have operated upon one unprotected class
“of the community! How wretched must
“have been the condition of an elderly
“maiden among the Jews, if such a cha-
“racter existed among them, when she was
“taught, by the prejudices of the public,
“to

“ to despise and to detest herself, as the ob-
 “ ject of human contempt, and divine dis-
 “ pleasure !

“ It is an image of humiliation and dis-
 “ tress too grievous for a gentle heart to
 “ dwell upon. Let us hasten to contem-
 “ plate the very different condition of the
 “ same character among the early Chris-
 “ tians !—Here, indeed, we behold an ex-
 “ cess; but of a more chearful and ami-
 “ able complexion : not an excess of absurd
 “ barbarity, but of tender enthusiasm. In-
 “ stead of bewailing virginity as an evil,
 “ they exalted it into an evidence of super-
 “ natural merit : they regarded it as a clear
 “ title, not only to celestial bliss, but to the
 “ highest degree of beatitude that Heaven
 “ can bestow.

“ I will not basely attempt to ingra-
 “ tiate myself with this audience, by
 “ adopting, from the fathers of the Catho-
 “ lic church, a flattering, illusive doctrine,
 “ to which the purity of our reformed
 “ religion can afford no countenance, for it

“ was

“ was not countenanced by that meek and
“ righteous Master, whose life and lan-
“ guage are the great unerring lights that
“ we profess to follow.

“ Though an advocate for a single life,
“ St. Paul himself acknowledges, ‘ That
“ concerning virgins, he had no com-
“ mandment of the Lord:’—and indeed
“ we find nothing in the words or actions
“ of our blessed Saviour, that can be fairly
“ construed into a recommendation of their
“ single state. That he was very far from
“ being a morose enemy to the joys, and
“ even the festivity of marriage, one of his
“ own miracles has sufficiently evinced: he
“ seems not, however, to have shewn any
“ prejudice or partiality towards any parti-
“ cular order of human beings, but to have
“ respected all the different conditions of
“ that life, which, for the good of all, he
“ condescended to assume. He respected
“ the natural liberties of mankind: he in-
“ terfered with no civil or social duties:
“ he forbid no innocent pleasures; and,
“ what

“ what is more to our present purpose, he
 “ recommended not an adherence to any
 “ precise state of life, because his own di-
 “ vine institutions are adapted to every
 “ condition into which a human creature
 “ can be thrown, by those busy shifters of
 “ human scenery, time and chance.

“ But it may be said, ‘ Although we readily
 “ allow the benign influence of Chris-
 “ tianity, upon all who sincerely profess it,
 “ we are warranted by reason and expe-
 “ rience in affirming, that certain modes of
 “ life have a tendency to throw a gloom
 “ over the mind, and to produce such a
 “ dejection of spirit, as naturally leads to
 “ lamentation ; and is not the celibacy of
 “ an ancient virgin an example of this
 “ truth ?’

“ We feel the full force of this question ;
 “ and imagination sets before us, what the
 “ world exhibits daily to many a spectator,
 “ a disconsolate maiden, the daughter of
 “ an opulent father, yet accidentally de-
 “ prived of all her fair prospects, all her
 “ tenderest

“ tenderest connections, and destitute of
“ fortune in the decline of life.

“ Shall we say to this solitary virgin,
“ ‘ Bewail not your condition ; for, if you
“ are a good Christian, you should be
“ happy ?’—No ! we will not address her
“ thus ; and shame on those ill-instructed
“ ministers of Christ, who insult the wretch-
“ ed with such abrupt and unfeeling admo-
“ nition ! It is our duty to penetrate, with
“ insinuating tenderness, into the painful
“ recesses of a suffering spirit. Let us
“ gently search into the natural train of
“ thought, which depresses the unfortunate
“ virgin, and pursue that line of consola-
“ tion, which the present turn of her own
“ mind may effectually suggest !—By what
“ is she depressed ? By the contrast, which
“ memory presents to her, between the gay
“ festivity of her early days, and the neglect
“ and solitude to which she is now re-
“ duced ; by the comparison, which ima-
“ gination suggests to her, between her
“ own desolate condition, and the different
“ destiny

“ destiny of those female companions of
 “ her youth, who were so fortunate as to
 “ marry. Let us follow this clue, and it
 “ may enable us to lead the dejected sufferer
 “ from the labyrinth of perplexed and
 “ gloomy thoughts into light and peace!
 “ Let us first indulge and humour the me-
 “ lancholy of her spirit! let us allow the
 “ seeming severity of her lot! let us say
 “ to her, ‘ You have, indeed, been unjustly
 “ overlooked by men, who have pitched
 “ upon companions less attractive, and
 “ have shared their wealth and splendor
 “ with partners far less deserving: but, be-
 “ fore you estimate their supposed felicity,
 “ examine the real state of those associates
 “ of your youth, whom marriage has placed
 “ in a condition so different from your
 “ own!—Let us try the first.—She is a
 “ woman of rank, of opulence, of gaiety;
 “ but her innocence was undermined by
 “ the supposed constituents of her visionary
 “ happiness; and your heart is too pure to
 “ envy

“ envy pleasures debased by infamy or
“ loaded with remorse.

“ Let us proceed to a second.—Behold
“ a woman, whom nature and education
“ had rendered a lovely compound of vi-
“ vacity and virtue! She was wedded to
“ the man of her choice, with the sanction
“ of her delighted parents. The figure,
“ the reputation, and the fortune of her
“ husband, made her the envy of all her
“ fair single friends: but alas! could they
“ have read her destiny, she would have
“ excited only compassion; for she soon
“ found, that the pleasing manners, the
“ enchanting talents, and the bright fem-
“ blance of integrity, in the man whom
“ she fondly thought all perfection, covered
“ a mind corrupted by licentious pleasure,
“ and a heart that could only counterfeit,
“ for a very short period, all the generous
“ characteristics of genuine love. His pas-
“ sion was extinguished by a few weeks
“ possession; and she then experienced, in

“ return for real and anxious affection, mor-
 “ tifying neglect, contemptuous sarcasm,
 “ and perpetual infidelity. His vices soon
 “ produced their natural effect, the ruin of
 “ his fortune, his temper, and his health.
 “ Haunted by every painful recollection,
 “ he now vainly tries to drown, in deeper
 “ intemperance, all ideas of his misery;
 “ while the innocent and still lovely victim
 “ of his various crimes, surrounded by in-
 “ digent and deserted children, looks up
 “ to those, her former companions, who
 “ have remained unmarried, as the most
 “ enviable of human beings.

“ But let us pass on to a third, and a
 “ much happier example of married life.—
 “ Here, indeed, as you truly observe, here
 “ we find every circumstance of character
 “ and condition, that is justly entitled to
 “ the name of fortunate. In this person
 “ we may behold the beloved wife of an
 “ affectionate and a sensible husband; the
 “ healthy and opulent mother of a nume-
 “ rous and lovely offspring. She has a
 “ heart

“ heart and spirit to relish happiness, and
“ she is surrounded by every thing that is
“ likely to give and to increase it. Her
“ condition is, in truth, opposite to that of
“ the elderly, indigent, and solitary maiden.—But let us take a nearer view of
“ this fortunate personage! let us visit the
“ mansion of felicity!—Where is the gaiety
“ that should surround it?—Good Heavens! what evil has befallen it?—All
“ is disorder and distress.—Mischance
“ has happened to one of the young and
“ favourite branches of this flourishing
“ house.—It is the cry of the distracted
“ mother over her darling, torn from her
“ by a calamitous death.—Let us retire! for
“ *her* we cannot comfort!—Her grief can be
“ alleviated only by that Almighty Power,
“ who has permitted it to be inflicted.
“ But we have received our lesson in the
“ piercing sound of her distress. A single
“ shriek of the mother, on the expiration of
“ her child, ought to drown for ever all the
“ petty murmuring of maidenly discontent.
“ Let

“ Let it not be said, that such calamities
 “ are rare ! Who has ever known a nu-
 “ merous family unvisited by sickness and
 “ sorrow ? O ! ye considerate virgins ! let
 “ me lead you to form a true estimate of
 “ all the good and evil in female life !
 “ Place, if you please, to the account of
 “ the wife and mother, all the more intense
 “ and more lively pleasures ! but enter
 “ fairly, at the same time, her anxieties,
 “ her terrors, her agonies, both of body
 “ and of mind ! enter also, on your own
 “ side of the account, your exemption from
 “ all these ! forget not the more certain
 “ and quiet enjoyments, which particularly
 “ belong to your own condition ! Examine
 “ the two accounts with strict impartiality,
 “ and perhaps you will find, that, in a
 “ course of years, the balance has run con-
 “ siderably in your favour.

“ But it should not be the sole business
 “ of a mortal to regard the enjoyments of
 “ human life ; a concern more important
 “ demands the attention of us all ; I mean,

“ the preparation for death. It is hardly
“ possible, that the virgin can be properly
“ prepared for this inevitable hour, who has
“ reached the latter end of a long life in the
“ habit of murmuring at her own lot, and
“ thereby condemning the dispensations of
“ that God, in whose presence she is so
“ soon to appear. But, on the other hand,
“ the ancient maiden, who has supported
“ the neglect and injustice of mankind
“ with pious resignation and content, has
“ such advantages over the married woman,
“ in the awful and important close of hu-
“ man existence, as more than repays her
“ for any supposed or real inferiority in the
“ point of worldly enjoyments. Let us
“ pursue this idea ! it leads us to interest-
“ ing contemplation. Circumstances that
“ attend the dying, of every station, are par-
“ ticularly deserving of our notice ; be-
“ cause, however different the degrees and
“ fashions of our lives, in the act of death
“ we must all resemble each other. It is
“ a trial universally endured, though va-
riously

“ riously sustained. Let me then conduct
 “ you, my sisters, to two scenes of this
 “ kind, different from each other, yet both
 “ affecting and instructive!—Let us first
 “ approach, and consider the death-bed of
 “ the Wife!—Behold a woman of virtue
 “ and of piety! behold her, after many blessings
 “ thankfully received, and many duties
 “ faithfully discharged, behold her devoutly
 “ hastening to her heavenly reward!
 “ —See! though her frame is shattered, her
 “ mind is still sedate!—yet see with what
 “ tender anguish she takes leave of an afflicted
 “ husband, who has been her fond
 “ and faithful guide in the paths of innocence
 “ and religion!—observe how her fortitude
 “ is shaken, by reading in his features a
 “ vehemence of distress bursting through the
 “ kind mask of resignation, which, in pity
 “ to her sufferings, he vainly labours to wear!

“ Yet even this is not her severest trial:
 “ as her life is hastening to its close, she
 “ yields to a parental and irresistible de-

“ fire ; she calls for her children, to fold
“ them for the last time to her bosom.—
“ Good Heavens ! what a scene !—O God !
“ release her, for she has lost the firmness of
“ piety itself !—her soul, engrossed by the
“ wants and sorrows of these little inno-
“ cents, and by a dreadful idea of what
“ they may suffer, should their father also
“ be taken from them—her distracted soul
“ pays no longer its just obedience to the
“ summons of her Maker !—Yet thou art
“ not offended, Almighty Parent ! for there
“ are weaknesses peculiarly entitled to thy
“ mercy ; and such are the fond excesses of
“ a maternal heart, to which thou hast al-
“ lotted the extremes of delight and agony.
“ Let us turn from this heart-rending
“ scene, to one, though equally awful, yet
“ much less afflicting ! Let us approach
“ the death-bed of the Ancient Maiden !—
“ Behold a woman, not endued with a
“ more cultivated understanding, or with
“ more habitual piety, than the dying mo-
“ ther whom we have just beheld ! but
“ O !

“ O! with what a different frame of mind
 “ and heart does the present expiring mor-
 “ tal support the most striking, if not
 “ the most important, of human trials!
 “ Observe with what serenity she contem-
 “ plates the visible approach of that de-
 “ stroying power, who has been called the
 “ King of Terrors!—She has led a life of
 “ innocence and content; but her soul is
 “ not rivetted to earth by those earthly
 “ fetters, which, in the preceding instance,
 “ the twin seraphs, Hope and Faith, were
 “ hardly able to unlock. Here religion
 “ operates without a check. This elderly,
 “ expiring virgin has, indeed, her tender
 “ attachments to relinquish; but she bids
 “ adieu to her friends with the placid air
 “ of one who is setting forth on a long-
 “ wished-for journey. She does not hurry
 “ from the world with the over-heated
 “ enthusiasm of Romish nuns, who call
 “ themselves, with an unbecoming famili-
 “ arity and fervour of language, the spouses
 “ of their God.—No! she contemplates

“ the gracious promises of her Redeemer
“ with the humble confidence of a faithful
“ and affectionate servant. She prepares
“ to meet him with the meek obedience of
“ tender humanity and unpervverted reason,
“ willing to quit a world, where she has
“ been frequently wronged and neglected,
“ to enter those blessed regions where
“ neglect or injustice can never be ad-
“ mitted.

“ O ! my sisters, what is the lesson that
“ these contrasted scenes may suggest to
“ us ? Is it not this ? that every good and
“ wise virgin of advanced life, instead of
“ sinking into the Jewish folly of bewail-
“ ing her virginity, should regard it as a
“ passport from Providence, which may
“ have conducted her through a vexatious
“ world, exempt from many of its severest
“ troubles ; and which may at last enable
“ her to pass the gates of death, not with
“ reluctant anguish, but with rational com-
“ posure and devout exultation.—To crown
“ all our disquietudes and conflicts by an
“ end

“ end so happy, is a destiny that the purest
 “ and happiest of human characters might
 “ esteem, perhaps, the most desirable of
 “ blessings ; and to this, my beloved sisters,
 “ may the God of purity conduct us all!—
 “ Amen.”

In descending from the pulpit I observed,
 with an honest pride, the effect of my dis-
 course in the features of the sisterhood.
 Several of them pressed around me to ut-
 ter their compliments on the occasion ;
 while others contrived to compliment their
 preacher in a manner still more engaging, by
 discovering to me, without affectation, the
 traces of those subsiding tears, which I had
 drawn from my tender audience, not by the
 real excellence of my sermon, but by the
 cordial fervour and apparent sincerity of
 my zeal. In truth, I had preached to them
 from the bottom of a feeling and benevo-
 lent heart ; and I had raised so forcibly
 before my own eyes the successive images
 which I presented to them, that, in deliver-

ing my sermon, I was myself affected even to tears, and obliged to pause, more than once, to recover the powers of my suspended voice.—The lady Seraphina, who spoke to me, as president, in the name of the community, had begun to honour me with a very delicate encomium, but checked herself on a sudden; and, observing that I had exhausted myself to such a degree that I was ready to faint, she hastily dispatched the good Melesinda for a glass of hartshorn and water. I was still within the chapel; for, perceiving myself in some danger of falling, I had supported my weak and emaciated body against a pillar. The compassionate lady abbess held one of my hands, which answered the honest pressure of her generous anxiety. Her favourite Fuscina continued, by her direction, to chafe my temples till the hartshorn arrived. I drank it with some difficulty, and, regaining a little portion of strength, I said to my charitable assistants, in a feeble and broken voice, “ Be not alarmed, my good sisters! you
“ see

“ see before you a frail and feverish mor-
 “ tal, whose trembling nerves have but too
 “ often refused to second and support the
 “ honest ardour of his soul. Accept, how-
 “ ever, my good intention, and allow me
 “ to live and die in your service !” The
 attentive lady abbess endeavoured to raise
 and comfort me with the most friendly and
 endearing expressions. She now conducted
 me, in the tenderest manner, into her own
 private apartment. She seated me on a
 most comfortable sofa, that filled a large
 recess in an elegant and spacious parlour.
 The room was decorated with many beauti-
 ful works, both of the needle and the pencil;
 but alas ! I was unable to contemplate their
 respective beauties, for the shades of death
 appeared now to be gathering very fast around
 me. The kind sollicitude of Seraphina re-
 doubled : she discovered the most fervent
 desire to restore my health. “ Excellent
 “ lady !” I exclaimed, with all the little
 voice that I could raise, “ disquiet not thy
 “ tender bosom with a vain expectation !—I
 “ perceive

“ perceive that my last moment is near,
“ and I ought not to regret it, since I have
“ obtained and enjoyed the great object of
“ my ambition, the affectionate favour of
“ your sisterhood. Yet there is one thing
“ that I have still to wish, and you alone
“ can indulge me.”—“ O name it! name
“ it!” said the tender abbess, pressing my
“ cold hand, and wetting it with her tears.
“ Yes, madam,” I replied, “ I will lay
“ before you all the little weaknesses of a
“ heart that has much to hope, and little to
“ fear, from a being so benevolent and
“ gentle as you are. I am a vain creature;
“ but your tenderness will call my vanity a
“ virtue. Indeed I covet not the most
“ envied distinction; I sigh not for pre-
“ eminence in learning, genius, or wit:
“ yet, I confess to you, I wish with great
“ fervour to attract the notice of posterity;
“ I wish, that as long as my name endures,
“ it may be honoured with the affectionate
“ remembrance of my fellow-creatures,
“ and particularly with the tender esteem
“ of

“ of your sisterhood.” — “ It must, it must,”
 said the good abbess, sobbing. — “ O !”
 replied I, enfolding one of her hands
 within mine, “ secure to me this delight-
 “ ful distinction ! you have the power of
 “ doing so : — give me your promise, that
 “ I shall be buried in your chapel, under
 “ a simple slab of white marble, with this
 “ inscription ;

“ Here lies

“ — — — — —

“ The Friend and Pastor

“ of Old Maids.”

The kind abbess assented, and I thus con-
 tinued : — “ I have yet another request :
 “ pray forgive the whimsies of a fond, and,
 “ perhaps, foolish old man ! — I conjure
 “ you, let me not be removed from this
 “ chamber, till the day of my interment ! —
 “ place me in my coffin just as I am, in
 “ this my pastoral habit ! and, as I confess
 “ I have

“ I have a secret horror of being buried
“ alive, pray let some of your good sisters
“ be so charitable as to watch my body,
“ during nine days at least, after my de-
“ cease !”

The tender Seraphina continued to signify her perfect acquiescence in all my desires ; not by distinct words, indeed, but a series of the most expressive and endearing gestures. — “ Enough ! enough !” I exclaimed, in a sepulchral tone ; and, bestowing upon her a benediction but half articulated, I with difficulty raised her unresisting hand to my clammy lips, then gently laid it on my own throbbing heart, and, having squeezed it against my bosom in a strong convulsive pressure, expired.

My spirit, however, remained fluttering and invisible in the chamber, and seemed to contemplate, with a sort of seraphic pride, the chaste, weeping abbess, and my own lifeless body. The excellent Seraphina would not quit the corpse for a single moment, till she was thoroughly persuaded
that

that the breath of the lamented pastor was departed from him for ever. She then gave such orders as were necessary for the literal accomplishment of my request. She permitted select parties of the kind and curious sisterhood to enter the apartment by turns, and indulge themselves in contemplating the countenance of their departed friend. My spirit was highly flattered and entertained by their various comments upon it, and by their many quick vicissitudes of maidenly curiosity and regret. At length a simple but elegant coffin was brought to the sofa on which I died. The body, without any change of dress, was deposited within it; but the coffin remained open. The admirable lady abbess herself determined to set the community an example of tender and generous attachment. She did me the unusual honour of watching the body the first night, attended by her two favourite sisters. In the evening of the subsequent day, it happened that Melesinda and Fuscina were left alone in this office. They
endeavoured

endeavoured to amuse each other by entering into a very curious and diverting debate on my character and constitution: but my modesty will not allow me to repeat the many flattering things which were uttered on this occasion. At last, when they had thoroughly discussed all my qualities—"I sincerely regret this good man," said the friendly Fuscina, "as the world contains but few such advocates for our sisterhood: but don't you think, my dear Melesinda, that we may ground some little hope of his revival, on his singular request of being attended nine days?—Suppose he should be only in a trance!—Good God!" continued the kind-hearted creature, "I would give the world to restore him."

As she uttered these words, she cast a piercing eye on my countenance, and, wetting the tip of her fingers with a little bottle of lavender-water, which she held in her left hand, she began to rub my temples with an eager anxiety, yet with some degree of that

that awe and trepidation which the dead are apt to inspire.

In a few moments she exclaimed, "Look! look! my dear Melesinda! am I mistaken? or may we not perceive a little dawn of colour on his cheek?"—Her benevolent heart beat high with expectation; and, seizing my hand, she said aloud, with the commanding, ecstatic air of a beneficent enchantress—"O thou gentle pastor, revive, and live for ever! not only for us, but for every future Old Maid!"—She seemed to speak with a prophetic transport; and at the same time squeezed my hand with such forcible pressure, that I awaked with mingled sensations of pain and exultation.

I looked wistfully around, and was surprised to find, instead of a kind and honest old maiden on each side of me, St. Basil's Discourse on Virginity at my left hand, and towards the right, an exhausted bottle of port.

In

In the first moments that I could clearly recollect all the particulars of my vision, I threw them upon paper, and resolved to make them serve me as the close of my elaborate Essay, in the hope, that good Old Maidens, who are said to delight in visions, may believe, like the honest folks in Homer, that they descend from heaven.

Whether I am really indebted to my good angel, or not, for this unexpected conclusion of my work, I shall now leave the candid critics of either sex to decide.— Frank and gentle spirits, who are willing to be pleased! let me request and advise you to consider this chequered production with that uniform good-nature and satisfaction, which the author has endeavoured to promote, and sincerely wishes you to preserve, not only through these pages, but in turning over every new leaf of your separate lives, whatever you may chance to find its contents!—Let me caution you against one possible error in your judgment of this performance! Do not, I entreat you, suppose
6 that

that these little volumes were written with an idle ambition of trying what supposed wit and learning could produce on a subject not very promising!—Do not, I conjure you, rank my Essay on Old Maids with the famous Meditation on a Broomstick!—I flatter myself it is far superior to that celebrated production in the merits of the aim proposed, though not in those of execution. I am willing to hope that my design will be thought to possess the charm of originality; but I cannot presume to think, that I am entitled to any such commendation for the conduct of my performance, since I must candidly confess, that it bears a very striking resemblance to many other philosophical essays, by ending in a Dream.

END OF THE ESSAY.

P O S T S C R I P T.

I CANNOT dispatch this courteous and gallant performance to the press, without recommending it, by a Postscript, to the particular patronage of that illustrious fraternity, the Knights of the Garter, with the original purpose of whose institution it will be found to have a very singular conformity.

I have heard, that a certain noble lord was free enough to declare, on receiving his blue riband, that he should not be much embarrassed by the new duties which it imposed upon him; namely those of killing dragons and defending virgins: intimating, with a sarcastic levity, hardly becoming a true knight, that a dragon and a virgin were equal rarities in the living world. What success this noble person

R 2

may

may have met with in his knightly pursuits and encounters, I know not; but I flatter myself, that I have happily performed the very exploits, for the attempt of which this ancient and noble order of knighthood was originally created; though I fear the whole fraternity of modern knights have, like the facetious lord I have alluded to, rather derided than fulfilled the high duties of their profession. In proof of my own achievements, I must overstep my natural modesty to observe, that in my chapter on the envy and ill-nature of Old Maids, I have subdued, or at least manfully attacked, not only one, but many dragons; for I doubt not but that incomparable naturalist, the Count de Buffon, will allow me, that the envious, ill-natured Old Maid is the most genuine dragon that nature has produced: that I have defended virgins, envy herself cannot deny; and, by chusing to undertake the defence of Old Maids, I have defended those virgins who are undoubtedly the most likely to preserve
their

their purity, and of course are the most entitled to protection.—Having thus fairly proved my unexampled pretensions to their regard, I recommend it as a point of honour, to all the princes and peers who are at present inrolled under the banner of our common patron St. George, to make me a little public acknowledgment for the unprecedented services which I have rendered to virginity, in their place. I doubt not but every true Knight will chearfully contribute the annual sum of twenty guineas, on so just an occasion, and think it a very moderate compensation for his own particular share in these more than Herculean labours, which I have happily performed, as a kind of acting lieutenant to the whole brotherhood of Knights. As this most noble Order consists of twenty-six members, the contribution I have proposed, allowing for vacancies in the Order, will supply me with an annual revenue of four hundred guineas; a decent provision for an honest veteran, worn out in this glorious warfare!

a well-earned stipend, to which I have assuredly an unrivalled claim; and for which, I shall be happy to see myself registered in the Court-calendar, with the new and truly honourable title of Deputy Dragon-queller, and Deputy Defender of Virgins, to all the Knights of the most noble Order of the Garter!

I am the more free to give this hint to the illustrious fraternity, because, as my work, I trust, may be truly called a national service, I certainly ought to receive a public reward; and, to the discredit of our country, I cannot discover, in all the pages of the red book above-mentioned, any place already existing, which may be considered as a proper compensation for my important labours. To the shame of a country which prides itself on achievements in literature, there are no posts of decent profit appropriated to literary heroes. To the disgrace and sorrow of the Muses, our poet laureat himself is registered, in the said red book, as receiving a stipend inferior to that assigned

in the same volume to his majesty's barber. I hope this may be an error of the press; for I own it appears to me a kind of treasonable sarcasm on all the late monarchs who have filled the English throne, by intimating, that he who decorates the outside of our sovereign's head, is entitled to a higher reward, than he is, whose labours are directed to exalt the mind and enliven the fancy of his king. However this may be, as the laureat's office has been recently conferred on a gentleman to whom literature is infinitely indebted, I sincerely hope his majesty will graciously correct the unprincely scantiness of the stipend, which custom has assigned to his poet, by adding a mitre to his laurel.

As to myself, I should, like other veterans, very humbly lay my long services and hard fortunes before the sovereign of the knightly order, whose duties I have discharged, and implore his protection of this performance, were I not restrained by a ge-

nerous regard to the fine feelings of a literary prince.

I am convinced, indeed, that his munificent spirit would be most willing to patronise an author, who has so heroically defended the most unprotected class of his faithful and fair subjects; but I recollect with pain, that his Majesty (God bless him!) found himself so exhausted by other acts of bounty, that he was unable to increase, at the request of his Chancellor, the little and hardly earned stipend of an illustrious literary pensioner, who wished to be supported in the expence of trying, if a foreign climate would retard or alleviate that stroke of death, which was soon to release him from all the miseries of mortal dependence.

When I think what a king, who professes a regard for literature, must have suffered from such inability to supply the transient wants of a dying genius, who did honour to his reign, I cannot bear the idea

of exposing a royal patron of letters even to a much smaller degree of similar concern, which he must certainly feel, if the champion of Old Maids applied to him for a gratuity, that he could not afford to bestow. Perhaps I am too delicate in this point; perhaps, regarding the glory, as well as the quiet and convenience of my sovereign, I ought to conjure him to counteract, in the eyes of posterity, by all possible attention to men of letters, his refusal to increase the salary of an aged, distempered moralist; such a refusal, as, if it were not to be weighed, in the balance of candour, with many opposite acts of munificence, would be sufficient to annihilate all the literary fame of an Augustus. But as this, though it is honest, loyal, and friendly language, might be misinterpreted by some courtly yet rough critics, I shall not attempt to introduce it (where it might appear, perhaps, an amusing novelty) within the precincts of the court.

When I reflect, indeed, on the refined
characters,

characters, capacities, and occupations of our peers ; when I consider, that to many of these noble persons, a book is the most useless thing in the world, and that some of them, who generously condescend to read a modern publication, yet prudently avoid the extravagance of buying it ; when I recollect, that a certain noble lord, who has affected the character of a *Mecænas*, and is enriched by a sinecure of some thousands per annum, was wise enough to declare, in a bookseller's shop, that he could not afford to purchase a new performance (which he confessed he had heard commended) on being informed that the author had affixed to it the enormous price of seven shillings and six pence ; when I reflect, I say, on these points, I chearfully retract my preceding application for the lucrative patronage of the Great, being convinced, that most of them may expend the annual sum of twenty guineas much more to their own convenience and pleasure, than by contributing

buting to the support of any author whatever.

In truth, I should deem it, on more mature reflection, a degradation of my own dignity to accept any patronage, except that of the numerous, intelligent, and powerful sisterhood, to whom my pen has been assiduously and affectionately devoted. There is, undoubtedly, some propriety in considering the order of Old Maids as the genuine patrons of literature, since curiosity, the mythological parent of all knowledge, is their established characteristic; and such, indeed, is the proficiency which some fair individuals of this order have lately made in polite learning, that, considering the little attention paid to this article by our men of business and our men of pleasure, there is reason to believe, that the society of Old Maids will very soon be found the most learned body in this enlightened kingdom.

As, I trust, I am the first author who has expressly dedicated his life and labours to
this

this worthy society, I flatter myself they will be unanimous in the opinion, that so voluntary and unprecedented an attachment has entitled me to a signal reward: I shall therefore suggest to them an idea that may conduce to our mutual honour; I shall modestly advise them to ennoble and support their professed servant, as the good people of our nation formerly supported their prince, by a contribution according to their respective fortunes, intitled *a benevolence*.

I recommend it to all the genuine Old Maids, who receive pleasure from my book (and, I trust, this description will include the whole sisterhood), to form themselves into little convocations of their order, in their respective counties; that each convocation may instantly appoint a president, to prevent confusion in their debates, and a maiden secretary, to collect and vest in the hands of my bookseller this honourable little tax, which, I doubt not, they will cheerfully levy on themselves, in proportion

to

to their finances, and to the amusement afforded them by this performance. As I have a very exalted opinion of the chastity and munificence of my fair countrywomen, I am persuaded that, however small the quota may be which every ancient maiden may contribute, the sum total of this benevolence will reflect the highest glory both on me and my patrons. To shew that I have a spirit able to keep pace with their liberality, I think it proper to make the following declaration:—Expecting the sum to be very great, I am determined not to diminish the capital, but, vesting it in the bank of England, to content myself with the interest till my death, which, as I have passed my grand climacteric, can hardly be very distant; I shall then bequeath this noble sum as a patriotic legacy, in trust, to our active and patient young minister, who will find it, I hope, no trifling assistance to his arduous and important project of reducing our national debt; and, without doubt,

doubt, he will prove a very warm friend to this performance, when he sees me converting my chaste patronesses, the Old Maids, into pillars of our state.

My readers will now perceive, to their great surprise, that the success of my Essay on Old Maids is a matter of high moment to the interest of our country—a point that my modesty would not allow me to mention (as authors less delicate would undoubtedly have done) in the first pages of my first volume.

Having thus chalked out a glorious line of conduct for my fair patrons and myself, I have only to take my leave, with a respectful bow to the sisterhood; and this I cannot do better than by declaring the infinite value that I set upon their favour. Princes themselves are but pensioners of the public, and, as my dignity and revenue will arise from the purest part of that public, I may certainly, by the most philosophical estimate of human honours, rank myself

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as superior to princes, if I acquire and support the hitherto unknown and unsurpassable title of Gentleman Pensioner to the immaculate community of Old Maids.

F I N I S.

